



Cornelius O'Callaghan of

STRATHALLAN.

BY

ALICIA LEFANU,

GRAND-DAUGHTER TO THE LATE THOMAS SHERIDAN, M.A.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

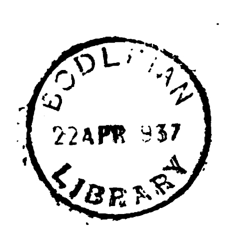
Quando scende in nobil petto
E compagno un dolce affetto
Non rivale alla virtù:
Respirate, alme felici
E vi siano i Numi amici
Quanto avverso il ciel vi fù.

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STRATHALLAN.

CHAP. I.

"Je n'examine point ma joie ou mon ennui,
"J'aime assez mon amant pour rénoncer à lui."

RACINE.—*Bajazet.*

On the day succeeding the scene that had passed near the Fountain of the Rocks, every thing seemed to wear an aspect of unusual gaiety and content. The countess was more kind in her manner than ordinary, and the looks of Strathallan expressed a soft and delighted triumph; Matilda alone could not forgive herself, and was even inclined to be angry with that appearance of satisfaction in her lover, which she felt so little disposed to share. The soft illusion to which she for a moment had yielded, was succeeded by the

bitterest repentance. For the first time she experienced the sting of self-reproach; and its power was, therefore, the more painfully strong upon her young and ingenuous mind. She had been led, though unintentionally, into an imprudence, in which her heart could not wholly acquit her of all blame; and after having passed a sleepless night, reflecting how best to repair it, it appeared to her that nothing but a frank confession of the whole to Lady Torrendale, could restore her to that peace and serenity of mind, without which she felt so completely unhappy. But how to make this confession, without leading the countess to suspect a partiality, which, under the circumstances of Strathallan's present engagements, would be most painful to the delicacy of her feelings, was the greatest difficulty. Lady Torrendale, however, soon gave her the opportunity she desired. The character of this lady was so habitually DOUBLE, that though really fond of both Arbella and Matilda, she

never could refrain from blaming the one to the other, when engaged with either in confidential discourse. She was, according to this laudable custom, expressing to Miss Melbourne her disapprobation of Miss Ferrars's coquetry, and her perpetual anxiety lest Spencer, (though incapable of entertaining a serious thought of one so much below what his pretensions entitled him to aspire to,) might be drawn by such arts into some imprudent declaration.

"How happy would it be for her," she added, "did she more resemble my charming Miss Melbourne, in whom every look and action is guarded by that high sense of honour, which is equally removed from artifice or imprudence." As the countess concluded this sentence with that condescending nod, with which she generally accompanied praise bestowed upon those whom she thought of less consequence, or who were younger than herself, the heart of Matilda burnt with the most painful emotion; it seemed as if suddenly too

large for her bosom, her temples throbbed, and a feverish feeling ran through her whole frame, while she listened with a sort of sickness, to praises, and received proofs of a confidence, which appeared to her at that moment so undeserved. In what respect was she superior to the unhappy Arbella, whom she heard so severely condemned? If her friend was to be blamed for engaging the affections of one brother, was she more innocent with respect to the other? Could Miss Ferrars feel for Spencer, an emotion which was not reflected in her own bosom, and to a greater excess, for Strathallan?

While these thoughts passed rapidly in her mind, she exclaimed in a tone of anguish, "Ah! Lady Torrendale, why did you not tell me some months sooner of Lord Strathallan's engagement?" "Why, how could it interest you?" returned the countess, with a look in which some surprise was expressed, but in which she could not trace any mixture of displeasure. Matilda saw that the time for con-

cealment was over, and making one great effort, she related, with timidity indeed, but with the most perfect simplicity and candour, the circumstances of her late interview with Strathallan; not without throwing the greater part of the blame where she thought it could very well be supported, upon Lady Emily.

When she concluded, she cast her eyes on the ground, and awaited with blushing cheeks and palpitating bosom, some of those haughty glances and disdainful sarcasms, for which she had reason to suspect Lady Torrendale could occasionally exchange her fond expressions and dove-like looks. She was most agreeably surprised by that lady's saying, with a smile of encouragement, while she kindly tapped her on the shoulder, "And is that all? well, I positively see nothing so terrifying in Strathallan's choosing to *make the agreeable* to you a little; though to do you justice, you have taken a great deal of pains to convince me, that Emily is more in love with her brother than you

are. Nay, do not start so at that word love, I know it is a very ugly one, but it makes you look very pretty; so pray go dress, and put on again those little cherub smiles which make you so dangerous, for I assure you there is no harm done."

This *quietus*, which her ladyship so constantly applied to any thing that alarmed the prudence of Matilda, contributed greatly to puzzle her, but at this moment it certainly afforded her consolation. She felt as if a mountain had been removed from her breast; and relieved from the fear of having acted with impropriety, the rebound of happiness was so great, that it produced an elasticity of spirit, and a lightness of heart, to which for some time past, she had been almost a stranger.

In this state of mind she passed the greater part of the day; but in the evening, when retiring to rest, she was surprised by a visit in her dressing-room from Lady Torrendale, her countenance all radiant with affectionate pleasure. "Joy, joy, my dear girl!" she said, while she

warmly pressed her hand in token of gratulation, "we triumph! every difficulty is removed, and Strathallan may follow the bent of his own noble, affectionate nature, in offering his hand where his heart has been so long fixed. Give me leave," she continued, "to be the first to salute my dear Viscountess on the change I have had the happiness to be instrumental in bringing about."

Matilda, pleased, surprised, but scarcely able to believe the intelligence thus suddenly conveyed to her, looked at the countess in silence, as if waiting a farther explanation.

"I perceive," said her ladyship, "I must be more explicit. Strathallan we, of course, allow to be *le premier des hommes;* but this Strathallan has a brother. Now I would not say any thing to detract from your matchless hero, but certainly, without absolutely deciding that 'the younger brother is the prettier gentleman,' it must be acknowledged that

my Spencer has, when he pleases, a manner still more insinuating. In short, there is no disputing ladies' tastes; and we have just made a discovery which is no more than what I have long suspected—that Miss Mountain is decidedly in favour of Fitzroy. Strathallan had been convinced of the coldness of his stately mistress, from the period of her strange reception of him after his return from Spain—that time, you know, when we were all so disappointed — agreeably disappointed. Well, as nothing is so mortifying to our lords and masters, as the idea that their dear persons can be absolutely and positively indifferent to us, this discovery led Strathallan to seek in some other prepossession, a less offensive cause for Miss Mountain's dislike, and he thinks he has at length found it out in her apparent preference of Fitzroy. 'Upon this hint I spake,' or rather I set to work; and you will feel inclined, I trust, to make me your confidant again, when you find how

warmly I have been engaged, like a little mole in the dark, in forwarding your interests."

Her ladyship then unfolded her plan, which was no other than to substitute her son Spencer in Strathallan's place, as a suitor to Miss Mountain. "He will declare himself," she said, "as soon as his brother has smoothed the way for him. She may stand a little upon punctilio at first, but in her heart I am sure she will be delighted; and I am much mistaken, if the animated attentions of a man like Spencer, do not soon make more impression on the lady, than the cold and constrained homage of a heart prepossessed like Strathallan's."

"But are you sure, madam," demanded the still-doubting Matilda, "that Miss Mountain can—that she does, I mean—prefer Captain Fitzroy to Lord Strathallan?"

"Positive, my dear; and a number of little circumstances, which I did not before remark, now serve to make this *pen-*

chant quite clear to me. Don't you remember, she used always, when we walked out, to allow Spencer to carry her handkerchief?—and have you forgot how fond she was of his great poodle dog, and what care she took of it in his absence?"

Obliged to be satisfied with the conclusive evidence of the handkerchief and the poodle dog, Matilda listened in silence to the countess, who continued:—"The great difficulty was, to get Spencer to admit the idea of addressing one, who had once consented to be united to his brother, for his delicacy on that subject is extreme. Affection for Strathallan, however, in the end got the better of his scruples, and he has at length consented."

Glad that the captain's delicate scruples were conquered in any manner, Matilda now ventured to contemplate the happiness that was offered to her; it delighted, but did not dazzle her—for it was Strathallan only, and not his rank, she loved.

She now listened with eagerness to

those details which the countess was equally pleased to give. Proud of her achievement, as any French *intriguante* under the old government could have been, of having effected a revolution in the cabinet, she alternately dwelt upon her own ability in carrying on the negociation, and the striking instance given by Spencer of fraternal affection, in thus sacrificing to it the refinement of his feelings.

Matilda, considering only the happiness which she thought she owed entirely to Lady Torrendale's active friendship, saw nothing but the kindness that appeared on this occasion to have influenced her feelings and actions; and while she contemplated her with a mixture of gratitude and delight, whispered to herself,—"How is it possible I ever thought this amiable woman indolent, selfish, and incapable of taking a generous interest in the concerns of others!"

Lady Torrendale was eloquent in removing any doubts with regard to the compliance of Miss Mountain. "Though

glad at heart to be released," said she, "and though she does not care a straw for Strathallan, she will, besides the other motives I have given for her conduct, feel a pleasure in making what will appear a generous sacrifice, while her feelings will be in reality about as acute as those of Mrs. S—— when, in the representation of some fine tragic character, she buries a dagger in her breast. Such a piece of easy heroism will be quite to her taste."

After spending a delightful hour in such conversation, Lady Torrendale hastily rose, crying,—"Adieu, my dear Viscountess! I must recollect that indulging you in these new *veilleés du chateau*, is not the way to make you appear to-morrow with those fresh roses, that should adorn the bride of Strathallan."

With a heart too full for language to express its feelings, Matilda threw herself into the arms of her noble friend, and burst into tears.

"For shame! for shame!" cried her

ladyship, laughing; "consider I am not Strathallan.—Farewell! I will not depart with our vulgar English Good night—the more animated Italian salutation, *Felice notte*, will, I think, better suit with the nature of your present feelings."

Sylph that presidest over dreams, accomplish the countess's wish! be not in haste to rouse thy lovely charge from her slumbers of felicity; for well thou knowest, that the fulfilment of all her dearest hopes cannot impart to her waking hours happiness so exquisite as it is the airy province of imagination to bestow!

Delightful as had been the company of her "lovely, lively" countess, Matilda felt, in the return of silence and solitude, a grateful change, as it enabled her more fully to indulge the overwhelming, yet charming sensation of unexpected bliss. She did not attempt to analyze the visions that presented themselves to her fancy; she feared too much to diminish any of their softness, brilliancy, and richness; she awoke with a confused, but soothing

sensation of inward satisfaction; she was conscious HE had been with her in her dreams, but the images they had presented she could not recal. It sufficed that, like a perfume which remains after the flower that gave it birth is gone, they left an internal spring of joy in her heart, which it would have been difficult for any outward circumstance to disturb. The happiness arising from the sensation of a half-forgotten dream is, in itself, of a purer nature than that which can spring from any more substantial reason; for as the latter acknowledges its earthly origin, by having necessarily some positive pleasure or advantage for its source, the former, in the very circumstance of its having no immediate cause, partakes more of the nature of the immaterial and invisible world, and seems to originate from the excursion of the free spirit which, while the body is weighed down by sleep, takes a momentary flight to a higher region, from whence it returns, bearing a foretaste of purer joys, and breathing the

airs of Paradise. What a pity that from such exalted contemplations, the breakfast bell should summon Matilda!

It was not without emotion, that she heard Lord Strathallan, who always rode out in the morning, order his groom to lead back his horse; and when she heard he was actually engaged in private conversation with Miss Mountain, her uneasiness became great, as the stake, for which she now ventured, was important; and a few doubts, she had before resisted as importunate intruders, now forced themselves upon her mind.

"His power is great, indeed, but can he persuade her to resign him with indifference? Ah, there alone I doubt it!" But again recalling the communication of the countess, which agreed so well with the observations she had made in the early part of their acquaintance, she rallied herself upon the absurdity of suffering such a suspicion to disturb her mind; and reconciling herself at length to the conviction, that there could be one wo-

man blind and unworthy enough to prefer Fitzroy to Strathallan, she allowed herself to give the reins to hope, delightful as unbounded. "Yes," she exclaimed, while a tear of rapture fell upon her cheek, "this explanation will clear up all; Miss Mountain only waits for it, and we shall yet be happy."

These reflections were on a sudden interrupted, by the entrance of Miss Hautenville, accompanied by the officious, and ever busy, Mrs. Stockwell; who, with her favourite exclamation, of "Lord bless my heart and soul! Lord bless my soul and heart!" cried out, "has nobody never a *romantic* vinegar-bottle for poor Miss Mountain, who went into an *historical* fit, at something my Lord Strathallan has been a telling of her, and has now fainted quite dead in the dressing-room?"

Though the first part of this account may, by some, be considered as nothing very uncommon in this lady, Matilda felt otherwise, and with an emotion, almost resembling the trepidation of con-

scious guilt, she followed her informant and her companion; who, by her haughty and reproachful looks, appeared as if she would willingly have struck the beautiful culprit dead, could a blasting glance have done it. They reached the room, where it was said the

"Giant statue fell."

There, surrounded by Miss Langrish, and three waiting women, Miss Mountain lay extended "long and large;" and, but for the unchanging brightness of her colour, looking, indeed, as Mrs. Stockwell represented her, inanimate. Matilda, approaching, took her by the hand, as it lay dead and motionless, but the extreme weight of the arm she had raised, soon obliged her to put it down again. She then began chafing her temples from her vinaigrette, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing Miss Mountain first open a little of one eye, and then (perceiving she was surrounded only by the female attendants, into whose hands Lord Strath-

allan had consigned her, as the most capable of administering relief) gradually extended them both "wild and wide." Then, heaving a deep sigh, she faintly murmured, "Oh, Miss Melbourne, you have robbed me of my love!"

The surprise and emotion with which Matilda heard these words, was rather lessened by observing that they were repeated with a calmness of countenance and manner, which gave more the idea of a lesson, than of a natural burst of the heart. Miss Mountain, having now reared up her enormous bulk, and appearing pretty well recovered, motioned with her wonted dignity, for her attendants to withdraw; which they did, with many a whisper of commiseration for the sweet sensibility of the young lady, and many an indignant and suspicious glance at Matilda; then, turning towards her, and looking down with that gracious bend, which her great height had converted into a habit, she, with much formality, thus addressed her.—"I have had an ex-

planation with Lord Strathallan, which discovers to me, that our situations, Miss Melbourne, might aptly be compared to those of Roxana and Statira, in ancient story. The more so, as his lordship is, I think, not unlike what historians have handed down to us as the description of the person of Alexander, except that he is somewhat taller; which, as I am myself above the common size, is no objection. As to the idea, that I preferred Captain Fitzroy to him, I have already convinced his lordship, as I am ready to convince you, that it is one of those unfounded reports, which rumour, with her hundred tongues, is always delighted to circulate. Captain Fitzroy, compared to Lord Strathallan, is indeed Hæphestion to Alexander; not but that Lord Strathallan might say, as that monarch did of Diogenes, if I were not Strathallan I would be Fitzroy. Yet, still, that he should wish to change places with his brother, would be the eagle desiring to be the goldfinch, the lion to become the lap-dog. Perhaps, you think, that as

Octavia pursued the faithless Antony to Athens, I will seek him round the world; and wherever I discover him, maintain my claim; or again, you may imagine that I will consent to give him up for his own advantage, as Berenice did Titus; which suppose you that I will do?"

Then, perceiving that she waited in vain for an answer, she pursued with inimitable complacency. "My preference for Lord Strathallan did not originate in one of those caprices of the heart, by which meaner souls are united; it was my father's wish that I should be his, and as such, I hold it a sacred duty not to suffer resentment, or wounded delicacy, on my part, to prevent the execution of his intentions. Lord Strathallan has seen (here she appeared to weep) the affection I bore him, by the immense effect his communication had upon a frame, ever too delicate to endure the vicissitudes of the passions. He has observed the dignity with which that affection was accompanied, in the noble self-possession,

which, in the most trying situations, I have till now, ever preserved; and he may perceive the generosity which is added to crown the whole, in the dispassionate manner in which I, at this moment, discourse with you, my rival. Having then no doubts of Lord Strathallan's character, as a man of honour, a man of delicacy, and a lover, I no longer feel any uneasiness as to the manner in which he will choose to act, when once he knows it is my unchangeable resolution—never to resign him."

Having said these words, Miss Mountain, with a low courtesy, the manner in which she generally concluded any declaration she thought remarkably impressive, sailed out of the room, leaving Matilda to reflect upon the strange situation in which she was placed. She remained for some moments in a sort of stupor, occasioned by the shock of surprise, and the contemplation of the extreme waywardness of her fate; she was obliged at once to bid adieu to all those flattering hopes she had so fondly cherished. But one

short night was past, and she had been saluted the bride of Strathallan! She must now relinquish those gay visions, for the severe and stern realities of life. That this compound of affectation and simplicity had no real love for Strathallan was, she thought, apparent—yet her obstinate resolution to keep him firm to his first engagement, rendered her as great an obstacle as if she had. Nothing therefore remained for Miss Melbourne, but to urge her lover, if such a step should be necessary, to the only part that honour dictated, and that could save him from the charge of perfidy, and her from that of deceit.

In the Caverna d'Aurora (oh! with what different sensations she entered it than those which at other times she had there experienced!) she met Lord Strathallan, more fully persuaded of Miss Mountain's indifference, and still more unwilling to listen to her arguments, than she expected—perhaps not more so than she wished. He had in youth, and before his

heart had made any other choice, consented to an engagement by which his father hoped to make him amends for any disadvantages, of which his second marriage might be the cause; but having now freed himself from those chains by an explanation which he thought Miss Mountain's pride would make her consider as just cause for a final dismission, he could not prevail upon himself to resume them. If he had been led into an error in supposing Spencer attached to her, we must refer to that gentleman's general gallantry of manner, and ambition to appear well with every lady as his excuse; while Fitzroy's vanity, which led him to admit the idea of the lady's partiality, the moment it was suggested to him, had tended to confirm Strathallan in his mistake; but though obliged to acknowledge himself wrong in his first supposition, he was equally unwilling to believe he could be mistaken as to the perfect indifference of Miss Mountain to himself, and he entreated, with all the earnestness of a first and

fervent passion, that Miss Melbourne would not suffer any needless scruple to make her retract those proofs of regard which to remember would form the happiness of his future existence.

Matilda, who having experienced the weakness of her own heart upon one occasion, was now afraid to trust to its flattering suggestions, only pleaded Miss Mountain's cause more warmly; and with that beautiful earnestness, in which self seemed for the moment annihilated, represented the proofs the young lady had that day given, of affection; and urged that they ought to be considered as the rule, that should guide a mind like Strathallan's in the only course it ought to pursue. "We have been in error respecting her," she said, "and we owe her reparation."

"But how can you suppose we have mistaken her? How can you think that she cherishes an attachment, which every look, every action, denies?"

"Why should I not? Has not poor

Miss Mountain's love led her to take the most distressing step, to which pride, like hers, could descend?—its frank avowal! We once, indeed, thought otherwise; but let that moment pass, like some tale, related of the hopes and fears of a person distant and unknown to us; to act generously, to act like yourself, you must forget it—banish it!"

"How easily you can talk of considering the hope of my life as a dream! You are anxious to spare the feelings of Miss Mountain," exclaimed his lordship resentfully, "while you heed not how you torture mine."

"I had thought," said Matilda, "that in shewing myself anxious for the preservation of that high honour which I had persuaded myself would sooner have endured any privation, than the slightest stain, I was shewing the consideration—the interest with which I was inspired, in the most flattering manner; I am sorry I was mistaken."

The colour of Strathallan, which had

frequently varied during this conversation, now assumed the brightest and most animated glow. "I yield," he said; "I will do any thing, every thing that Matilda and honour require of me; yet by that very action to sacrifice my hopes in such a heart!—to relinquish my right even to ask that you should not forget me!"

The tears of Matilda declared, but too well, how unnecessary was such a request.

"Reflect, I intreat," he pursued, "my dearest, my only beloved, before you hurry me to this resolution, that you are perhaps sacrificing our mutual happiness to a vain punctilio. I am persuaded, notwithstanding her violent demonstrations to the contrary, that I am to Miss Mountain, an object of indifference."

"Ah, Strathallan!" exclaimed Matilda, no longer able to control her feelings, "can you think that possible?"

This expression, which, in a woman of a character less free from art, might have been blamed as an encouragement to the

passion which she professed to wish subdued, spoke so perfectly the struggle of that delicate and generous heart, that it conveyed more than a thousand arguments to Lord Strathallan's. "Yes," he exclaimed, while the emotion of his voice bespoke his inward conflict, "angelic creature! I will pursue the path which alone can render me worthy of such virtue! Cruel thought! that I can only do so, by adopting that conduct which will forbid me for ever to aspire to it!"

The effect of Matilda's counsels was soon perceptible in the reconciliation of Strathallan and Miss Mountain. A heart so severely tried as his, required, however, some interval of reflection to recover its tone; and unable to live in the daily contemplation of loveliness, which he was no longer to hope could be his, he suddenly recollected an engagement to a friend in a distant part of the county, secretly resolving never to return to that dangerous scene, till the enchantress, who had disturbed his peace, had quitted it.

A day or two afterwards, the term of Miss Mountain's visit being expired, she took leave, while Spencer, inexpressibly chagrined and disappointed at the recent check his ambition and vanity had received, and having no longer any pretext for absenting himself from his regiment, prepared to rejoin it; suffering under a state of depression not easily to be imagined; but which he had the art, in a parting interview with Arbella, to lay entirely to the account of his attachment to her, and his fears respecting the opposition it might encounter from his father.

Matilda did not receive from Lady Torrendale the applause she expected for the generosity of her conduct. When that lady was informed of the share she had had in recalling Lord Strathallan to a sense of the obligations incurred by his first engagements, she expressed more surprise than pleasure, and coldly observed, that she thought it was for Lord Strathallan himself to judge, what was most calculated for his own happiness.

"I should have thought so too, madam," said Matilda, modestly but firmly, "nor should I have presumed to interfere in any case in which my interests had not been so mingled with his."

"Then why not let them be mingled?" interposed her ladyship, fretfully. "I put you in the track to attain to distinction and happiness; I could do no more." But then, as if ashamed of her injustice, she begged of Matilda to excuse a warmth which originated in her anxiety to see her dear young friend established in a manner suitable to her merit; praised the part she had acted, and requested she would not mention her name as having been adverse to it.

In the mean time Lord Torrendale, divided between the plans of personal aggrandizement, and real benevolence, which engrossed his whole attention, had no suspicion how nearly the immense possessions of Miss Mountain had been transferred from his eldest, to his youngest son. While county meetings, proposed im-

provements on his estate, tolls and turnpikes, boroughs and barracks, charters and charity-schools, by turns claimed his time and thoughts, the ingenious cabals of his active and restless countess were about as well known to him as the secret designs of the court and cabinet of Japan.

It was some days after the departure of his two sons and that of his fair visitant, that he began to perceive something of a change. Having made enquiry, in his absent way, why he did not see Strathallan and his brother as usual,—"You forget," said his lady, peevishly, "they went away from us the beginning of this week."

"Indeed! and Miss Mountain, where is she?"

"She is gone too. Surely you remember, my lord," returned the countess still more impatiently, "she took leave of us yesterday."

"Gone!" repeated Lord Torrendale, with a look of astonishment; "I thought they had all spent the day with us!"

CHAP. II.

Playful and artless, on the summer wave
Sporting with buoyant wing, the fairy scene
With fairest grace adorning; but in wo,
In poverty, in soul-subduing toils,
In patient tending on the sick man's bed,
In ministerings of love, in bitterest pangs
Faithful and firm; in scenes where sterner hearts
Have cracked, still cheerful and still kind.

COLERIDGE, *Remorse.*

THE serenity which Matilda experienced as the reward of the painful sacrifice she had made, though deep, heartfelt, and beyond what can be conceived by those, who, living only for the moment, know not what it is to yield up inclination to the more imperious call of duty, was not, however, of a nature to allow her to enjoy, with her former relish, the trifling pursuits of the circle in which she moved; and to this distaste was soon added another, and a more serious cause. Anxiety re-

specting her parents now began to make every pleasure of Woodlands insipid; a considerable period had elapsed beyond the time originally fixed for their return, and yet she had not lately received from them, any letter to account for this unforeseen delay. She determined at length to write, requesting that she might be no longer kept in this torturing state of suspense; and was just sitting down to execute her intention, when she was startled by the sudden entrance of her own maid, who addressed her with—"Ma'am, a gentleman in black, who waits below, says he wants to speak to you."

Matilda was in that state of mind, which the smallest circumstance is sufficient to agitate and alarm. Not immediately recollecting that the girl, (who was the daughter of one of the neighbouring cottagers, lately hired to attend her) was not acquainted with Sowerby's appearance; nor adverting, at the moment, to the circumstance of his having, since the death of his wife, constantly dressed in black, a

thousand vague and agonizing apprehensions assailed her, as to the name and business of the ominous stranger. Her old friend's first approach was not indeed calculated to dissipate them. He met her at the parlour door, his countenance pale beyond its usual sallow hue, his eyes wild, and lip quivering. "Do not be alarmed, my dear Matilda," he exclaimed as she entered; but his looks and manners so decidedly contradicted the words he uttered, that they only increased the perturbation they were meant to allay.

"For God's sake, do not conceal any thing from me!" she exclaimed, "You have heard from my father and mother! —He is ill—they are both ill—too ill to return perhaps—tell me, I entreat you—tell me the worst!"—"You distress yourself unnecessarily, my dear girl," said her considerate friend, who had now in a degree recovered himself; then pausing, as if seeking for terms in which most gently to convey the intelligence, "I have heard from your mother," he said;

"she is well, quite well; but your father has had a slight return of his former complaint, a very slight one; but as his physicians have, for the present, forbidden his travelling, he has expressed a wish—nay, do not turn so pale, my love,—not to be longer deprived of your society."

"I understand you, my best, my truest friend," said Matilda, with a look in which she endeavoured in vain to stifle the anguish that was rising at her heart, "and I will try to prepare myself with serenity for whatever——" Here her voice lost its assumed firmness, and Sowerby taking occasion to interrupt her, said, "Do not, I entreat you, so fatally misconstrue the meaning of a communication, by which I intended to save you from suspense and alarm, and not to increase them. I am going to London to be with your father, as I think, in his situation, the presence of a friend is the best medicine that can be administered. My sister accompanies me, and if you have no objection, we shall be happy to take you under her care." He

turned, as he spoke, to a lady, who bowed in silence as he presented her. Matilda had never heard that Sowerby had a sister, but on his introducing the stranger, she contemplated her with some curiosity. Apparently absorbed in her own thoughts, and not wishing to be called from them, she occupied one corner of the window, yet hardly seemed to perceive the objects that passed before her; her face was veiled, but the light that fell full upon it, still partly discovered a countenance that was most engaging and interesting, but touched with a degree of sadness, which appeared to the distressed Matilda in unison with the melancholy circumstances of the moment.

This lady had certainly something singular, both in her dress and manner; her eyes had an expression almost plaintive, her air was dignified, though mild. What was remarkable, her brother never introduced or mentioned her by any but her Christian name of Clara.

"As I suppose," continued Sowerby,

forcing a smile, "that you have not many very important preparations to make, we shall, with your permission, call for you in a couple of hours." Matilda signified her assent by a motion of the head, for she was unable to speak. She felt, by the hastiness of this summons, how much more urgent the necessity of her presence must be, than Sowerby's friendship chose to represent it. "Farewell, dear amiable child!" he said, as he took leave; and while he gazed on her, his stern countenance assumed an expression of interest the most painfully anxious; his eyes filled with tears; he attempted to say more, but something appeared suddenly to interrupt him, and again recommending her to lose no time in preparing for her journey, he hurried out of the room.

When the countess was informed of the necessity for her young friend's departure, she expressed the warmest sympathy in her distress, kindly took her hand, and regretted much that she was not then going to London, that she might herself

conduct her thither: and here followed a pathetic digression on Lord Torrendale's cruelty in having kept her so long in the country; from which Matilda with difficulty brought her back to the purport of her present communication, which was, to thank her ladyship and Lord Torrendale for all their former kindness, and to mention the necessity of her being in readiness to attend the summons of Mr. Sowerby and his sister, in two hours at furthest.

When the moment for Miss Melbourne's departure arrived, Lady Emily clung to her arms, and would hardly by force be separated from her. It seemed to her, that she was at once deprived of her companion, guide, and instructress. "I shall be lost, Miss Melbourne," said she, while the tears ran down her blooming cheeks, "I shall become the poor, little, idle, untaught creature I was, when first you knew me. Who will encourage me to be otherwise, now I have lost both you and my brother? Indeed, I can hardly

wish it. No, I am determined I will not do any sort of good till you return."—"Then I hope I shall return soon, Emily," said Matilda, forcing a smile, which gleamed like a rainbow through a fast-dropping shower. The little girl then bending forward, in a whisper added, "Ah, Miss Melbourne! what shall I say to Strathallan?"

Matilda started: it seemed as if the trifling sorrows of love were a profanation to the sacredness of her present grief. She was not sorry the impatient voice of Sowerby prevented the necessity of any reply; and again waving her hand, and kissing it to the friends she left behind, she soon found herself again with him who had been her first, and perhaps her sincerest friend; and his sister, who seeming hardly desirous to be observed, sat silent, and still veiled, in one corner of the carriage.

Each of the travellers being absorbed in melancholy reflections which they could not communicate to each other,

Matilda found little to disturb the mournful tranquillity which had succeeded the bustle of departure. Could any thing have drawn her thoughts from the subject that so painfully occupied them, it would have been the kindness and courtesy of Sowerby, so unlike his usual harsh and overbearing manner. He who might truly be said to prefer the house of mourning to the house of feasting, had completely dropped his wonted asperity, in apprehension for his friend and sympathy for his young companion. With surprise, mixed with pleasure and admiration, she beheld the man who had often damped the hour of gaiety by the most capricious and ill-founded complaints; whose fastidious delicacy the least opposition would irritate, the least inconvenience distress, now, all kindness and consideration for the feelings of his still more pensive companions.

No complaint escaped him, no dispute occurred to disturb the course of their mournful journey; at the end of two days, through which Matilda had never

bestowed one thought on Strathallan, she found herself in the arms of her mother, and had flown to her father's couch, who seemed to have recovered new life to embrace her; but this was a momentary relief, and, much as she had been prepared for a change, the total alteration in his appearance, effected during the course of a few weeks, surpassed all that her strongest apprehensions had taught her to expect. Mr. Melbourne, in the ardent prosecution of his favourite pursuits, had, when in the country, too long neglected the frequent threatenings of a pulmonary complaint, which had at length attacked him with great violence. Though he had been afterwards persuaded to use more caution, it had returned upon him in town; and a fever, occasioned by vexation, anxiety, and a total change in his habits and modes of living, being added to its slow and destructive influence, he was now reduced to a state of weakness, which left little hope that his life could be preserved. When she first saw him, he had an inter-

val of ease; he was sitting up, supported by pillows, and as she approached, he cried "I wished but to live to bless my eyes with the sight of my Matilda once again. She is come, and I am satisfied."

"Oh, do not say so!" exclaimed the weeping Matilda, who felt at this moment, that if she could see her father restored to the health and vigour he had enjoyed at the Rocks, she could spend a life with pleasure at his side, nor ever wish again for any farther happiness. Next to the presence of his daughter, the arrival of Sowerby seemed to give Mr. Melbourne satisfaction. This gentleman spent every hour that he could spare, by the sick couch of his friend; and from the occasional animation, caused by the society of those he best loved, drew a flattering augury of his recovery.

Matilda listened to his prognostics, with all the sanguine eagerness of youth. Vain hope! the relief was transient, the suffering continual and intense; and Matilda had for some days the inexpressible

anguish to behold this beloved parent, whose mild commands had never been issued to her in any form but that of kindness, and whose singular sweetness of temper was such, that she had never heard from him a harsh expression, or an unjust reproof, gradually consuming away, under sufferings, of whose greatness she could judge by their visible effect on his enfeebled frame, though that same mildness of temper, and habitual philosophy, prevented a single complaint from escaping him. Sometimes, when gazing on his child, an expression of mental anguish and anxiety would pass across his features; but otherwise, ever calm, his life seemed to be ebbing away, without, on his part, a struggle, a sigh, or a regret.

One day when he was sitting up, and had been looking at her with more intentness than usual, she asked him if he wished any thing that she could do for his relief. "Nothing," he replied, "but to thank you for all your kindness, my dearest girl, and to return my acknowledgments

to Heaven, while yet I can, for having given me a daughter, who during the course of her short life, never willingly caused me a moment's pain." While Matilda's tears fell, as a tribute, to the melancholy pleasure this solemn declaration afforded her; he said kindly, as in one hand he held hers, and in the other that of Mrs. Melbourne, "I believe there are few who pass their last hours so happily in the full possession of all they hold most dear. In my plan of life, I may have been mistaken, but it has constituted my own happiness: I never sought for numerous friendships; my wish was rather to enjoy the individual tenderness of a heart that should be devoted to me alone; neither did I look for pleasures in that world, where they are supposed to be usually found, but in a few pursuits, for the success of which I depended only upon myself. I may have been blamed as retired, unsocial; but my solitary studies and enjoyments never prevented me from doing any good office in my power,

to my fellow creatures; and they were innocent, at least in the eyes of that Being, whom I never voluntarily offended, and to whom I shall soon present myself, with a heart resigned, and, though humble, yet full of confidence." Then turning more particularly to Mrs. Melbourne, he added, after a moment's pause, "I have sometimes reproached myself with not having studied your happiness, as much as my own gratification; and reflected, that I had not always to the utmost afforded Matilda every advantage, to which her birth and uncommon attractions entitled her; but if it was so, your conforming goodness, that ever left me in doubt, whether all my wishes were not your own, will now, I am sure, equally lead you to forgive me."

Mrs. Melbourne, anxious to turn him from this conversation, begged he would not let a doubt disturb that composure, on which depended their best hopes of his recovery; she then pressed him to take a cordial draught, which his phy-

sician had ordered at stated hours to be administered.

"I thank you," he replied, "my best love," the name by which he most often called her; "how refreshing it is from your hands!" Then, affectionately smiling upon her, he expressed a wish for rest, and, leaning back in his chair, seemed in a few moments sunk in profound repose. Mrs. Melbourne, with an action commanding silence, retired with Matilda to a small distance, not to interrupt his slumber. At length the perfect and motionless serenity in which he lay alarmed them, and softly approaching, it was not till some moments after the event, that they discovered these grateful and affectionate words had been his last; and that, in breathing forth expressions of habitual kindness and benignity, this blameless and gentle spirit had ascended to the source from which it first derived its being.



CHAP. III.

The heart that sorrow doomed to share,
Has worn the frequent seal of woe,
Its sad impression learns to bear,
And finds full oft its ruin slow.

But when the seal is first imprest,
When the young heart its pain shall try,
From the soft yielding trembling breast
Oft seems the startled soul to fly.

LANGHORNE.

THE faithful and persevering attachment of Sowerby, in taking upon himself the charge of every mournful office for his departed friend, deprived the unhappy survivors, at the moment, of the support his presence might have afforded; but perhaps it was compensated by the additional freedom in which they indulged together, in the first transports of a grief which the world could not have understood, and poured forth the expressions of a sorrow, so just and sincere, till by de-

grees it subsided into that calm melancholy, which rather cherishes than shrinks from the contemplation of the past. Sowerby had attended the remains of his friend to the Rocks, to see the last sad duties paid to them; and to watch over the interests of his family, now that place was no longer to be their abode. All Mr. Melbourne's valuable collections, his books, prints, and manuscripts, were to be sold for the benefit of his widow and daughter; and under the superintendance of a friend so intelligent and attached, they had every reason to expect the business would be transacted for them in the most advantageous manner. On the death of Mr. Melbourne, the estate of the Rocks devolved on Sir Harold Melbourne, the nearest male relation of the family; but on the change this circumstance might make in her situation and prospects, Matilda's grief had not yet allowed her leisure to reflect. Wholly occupied with the greatness of her irreparable loss, there were moments in which her young

heart, unused to sorrow, could hardly believe the extent of that which was now inflicted on her; then would the occurrences of the last weeks appear to her but as a feverish dream, and it seemed impossible that so short a period should have robbed her of so large a portion of her happiness. That time was too brief to produce any alteration in her outward form, which had caused such a revolution in her inward feelings; the aspect of every thing around her was the same, while every thing was in reality so much changed. Then, putting her hand to her eyes, as if endeavouring to exclude every thing but the past, she would say, "'Tis all a dream; so lately he was here; so lately could feel pleasure in my society, and thank me when I administered to his comfort, with a look that repaid every exertion! And is he no longer sensible to those exertions, and can he be gone, gone for ever, and I still bear to live and mourn him! Oh, I did not love him enough, I did not value him alone, and now I am punished for it!"

During this period of affliction, Matilda often afterwards remarked with surprise, how seldom Strathallan had been the subject of her thoughts; that image, which so short a time before had appeared to rule them with such despotic sway, now, if not wholly obliterated, had at least lost much of its force. It was then that she discovered how much the powerful ties of nature prevail, in an unsophisticated mind at least, over the fragile and fantastic bonds of love; by this, she also felt, however well grounded may be the supposition, that grief subdues the mind, and disposes it more readily to tenderness; yet, that to experience in their full force those soft but lively emotions, which grace, spirit, and loveliness, are calculated to inspire, it requires a mind comparatively at ease, a heart ready to vibrate in unison to those sweet impressions. Those gay visions of beauty and of love, which, thick as motes in the sunbeam, had danced before her fancy in the flowery arbours of

Woodlands, vanished amid the mournful duties and gloomy scenes of her town abode. New trials and new cares soon called her at once from these reflections, and from remembrances more painful; and an incident discovered to her a secret, which nothing but Mrs. Melbourne's unwillingness so soon to add to the sufferings she had already endured, had prevented her from revealing long before.

She had for some time observed that her own maid, who had been permitted to accompany her to town from Woodlands, had appeared sullen and dissatisfied with her situation, and often failed in the respect she before had uniformly shown her.

One day, when remonstrating with her upon leaving some work neglected, which she had desired her to finish, Susan answered, that she had work of her own to do, "for if I don't finish my new bonnet myself," she continued sulkily, "I sha'n't have any thing fit to be seen in when Miss Mountain's woman, and all the qua-

kity folks, comes up to town: for I have not been paid my wages, to buy one, by your lady mamma, I don't know when."

"I don't think I ever refused you a bonnet, Susan," replied Matilda, "but do you suppose this is the way to recommend yourself to my service, or that I shall long retain you, if you continue to treat me with this disrespect?"

"Service!" cried Susan, sticking her arms a-kimbo, "I'll warrant there's many a prettier service going a-begging than one, where folks is all at sixes and sevens, as I may say. There's to be no more going to the Rocks, as I hear, and to tell you a piece of my mind, I'm tired of poking about in this sort of a place, where one gets no fun, and sees no company."

Matilda, her mind painfully occupied by other and higher considerations, had hardly remarked what was now forced upon her observation, that the appearance and furniture of her lodging in town, was not equal to what she might have supposed

Mr. Melbourne's circumstances required. Her unpleasant feelings disappeared, however, almost as soon as the object which had excited them. "That this should grieve me!" she said, smiling, as in contempt upon herself, on recollecting the maid's impertinence; without adverting to its being of any serious consequence, she yet, from her habitual care to save her mother the slightest pain, resolved against communicating the circumstance to her. But Mrs. Melbourne, who perceived something had disturbed her daughter, easily divined the cause, and said, with a forced smile, "I guess what has made you uneasy, for I saw you in close conversation with Susan just now, and I suppose she was giving you some of the fine-lady-like airs she has lately assumed." Matilda, while she affected to treat the matter with equal lightness, confessed there was an alteration in the manner of the young woman, which made her conversation not very exhilarating.

"So, she has heard some rumours of

what has happened; 'tis what I expected," said Mrs. Melbourne, in a smothered tone, and dropping her assumed cheerfulness. "The thoughtless scorns, and bitter slights of servants, are the first fruits of the miseries of the poor." Then addressing Matilda aloud, she said, "can you bear, my dear girl, a communication, which will add heavily to what you now must feel; yet, I fear 'twas only false tenderness which has till now concealed it."

"Ah, mamma, what can add to my affliction, since" —— Here she paused, observing the change in Mrs. Melbourne's countenance; and suddenly the most painful apprehensions for her health and safety, or that of some of those who were dear to her, filled her mind. Mrs. Melbourne, perceiving the excess of her uneasiness, and wishing to relieve her, at least from the torments of suspense, continued—

"But a few weeks ago you were in possession of a fortune, which was sufficient to have preserved you in affluence,

even when obliged to consider the abode of your childhood no longer as your home; that fortune, by the failure of those in whose hands it was placed, is gone; and you must, my dearest girl, by the exertion of that spirit and principle to which I have from childhood formed your mind, endeavour to conform it now to your altered situation."

"Is that all!" cried Matilda, breathing more freely upon finding the communication so much less dreadful than she had expected.

"All! Sweet, untaught girl, you view it in that romantic light which conceals, from those unlectured in the world's hard school, that loss of fortune is indeed almost loss of every thing; of pleasure, of consequence, of friends; but why should I anticipate—I will rather, since I have thus far opened myself, treat you with that confidence your generous spirit still more than your age, should now for the future ever claim. You have heard me say that your father, in marrying me,

was influenced by preference alone; his liberal spirit would not suffer him to consider my want of fortune as a disadvantage, and possessing himself at that time but the portion of a younger brother, retirement was adopted by us both, as much from necessity as choice. When, by the death of his beloved relative, he came into possession of affluence, unenvied and undesired, he was anxious to secure a part of its enjoyment to me; but as I had brought him no fortune, a delicacy, perhaps misplaced, made me ever averse to the proposal: as I knew, however, that if we were not blest with a son, the estate of the Rocks must go from our part of the family, I acquiesced with pleasure in a plan that he thought would secure to me a compensation for what I had declined, which he adopted from the moment he came into possession of it: part of the income of every year we laid by, to accumulate as a fortune for you. As we had neither of us expensive tastes and habits, this overplus would at all

events have risen to some amount; but from the increasing, and perhaps unnecessary seclusion, into which your dear father's peculiar turn of mind gradually led him to indulge, it became considerable indeed; and you were at eighteen possessed of a portion that avarice itself would not have overlooked, while taste and love——

"How often have I anticipated," continued Mrs. Melbourne, while tears of affection sprung into her eyes, "the hour when with proud delight I should present you to an admiring world—and must such sweetness be consigned to obscurity?"

"Why should I wish a different fate from yours?" replied Matilda; "why, rather, dearest mother, did you not permit me to share all your anxieties, to accompany you on this cruel journey, which I am sure was undertaken on my account?"

"I hoped to spare it you all," resumed Mrs. Melbourne. "While yet in the country, we received private notice from

a friend in London, who was anxious for our welfare, of the diminished credit and apprehended failure of that house, in which the whole accumulated sum we had so long destined for you was placed. Mr. Melbourne would not delay a moment, weak as he was from recent illness, to hasten to town, still hoping the representation of his correspondent might be false or exaggerated; or that, at all events, he might be in time to withdraw his property from it before its final ruin. Useless precaution! We arrived just in time to hear of that crush which involved us, in common with so many others, in one general destruction. Still we rejoiced you were not present, to share the first shock of our dismay. We had left you with our only Derbyshire friend, under the idea of sparing you the sight of anxieties, and the knowledge of unpleasant affairs, with which, if they terminated favourably, you need never have been made acquainted, if otherwise, were better communicated on our return. While the

Rocks were ours you would still have had the enjoyment of affluence, though deprived of your former expectations; therefore, had your father lived"——

Here Matilda, heedless of her own afflictions in the desire to console her mother, interrupted her, to profess her readiness to adopt any views which this reverse in her prospects might make necessary; and her perfect resignation to this additional weight, light indeed in comparison with the other which it had pleased Providence to inflict on her.

"I have no view, no wish at present," replied Mrs. Melbourne, "but to recover, if possible, that peace of which we have been deprived; and to hide myself from those who knew me in a far different situation."

"Oh! mamma, why would you deny them the greatest pleasure they can possibly experience," said the artless Matilda, "that of shewing you that no difference in your situation can alter their sentiments; as it was your character, not your fortune, inspired them, surely no

change of circumstances can affect them: there are the Torrendales, Miss Ferrars, Mr. Sowerby—"

"Oh, Lady Torrendale!" repeated Mrs. Melbourne, with that tone of slight and indifference which speaks but little hope; "and as for Sowerby," she continued, "he was truly attached to his friend, but to me he never was kind; an indescribably irksome manner of undervaluing every thing I said and did, ran through his whole behaviour; and now the tie that cemented our intimacy is gone, it would not surprise me, if he should soon completely desert a society, to which I can no longer contribute the attention and spirits that made it formerly agreeable to him. With some good points of character, he is an egotist in the truest sense of the word, selfish—fastidious—overbearing—"

The entrance of the gentleman in question put an end, for the present, to the *catalogue raisonné* that Mrs. Melbourne had been giving of his virtues. He seemed embarrassed at seeing Matilda, and

desirous of some private conversation with her mother. Accustomed to watch his looks with almost filial attention, the young lady soon took an opportunity to indulge him in what he wished; but though absent, she was not long kept ignorant of the subject of their conversation.

"We have been speaking of your virtues, my dearest child," said Mrs. Melbourne, "but before I tell you how much Sowerby values them, let me remind you of what my whole life has proved,—that your happiness is ever my first object, and that I do not wish any representation of mine should bear the force of a command, but rather that of the counsel of a tender and enlightened friend. Sowerby loves you, and has generously offered, upon this reverse of fortune, to share his affluence with you; now tell me truly, could you accept him without repugnance?"

Matilda looked down, and remained for a moment in deep reflection; then raising her mild eyes, in which a modest confi-

dence and dignity were expressed, "I think," she said, "that from the whole tenor of Mr. Sowerby's conduct, and the recent proofs of friendship he has given me, I could, I do not say love, but regard him sufficiently, almost to wish to give him my hand, if it could contribute to his happiness; but then my choice must seem free, my situation be what it has been. As it is, when my altered views are opposed to his wealth, his age—Oh, mamma! I hope," she continued, casting down her eyes and blushing, "that I do not deceive myself, but I think love, love alone, could excuse my accepting such an obligation."

"And you cannot give him this same love!" repeated Mrs. Melbourne, thoughtfully, "Is it so? Am I not sufficiently your friend, to deserve to know, it is because it is bestowed on another?"

"No, no indeed, that's all over," replied Matilda, hastily; and then, upon an exclamation of surprise escaping Mrs. Melbourne, she related, with that ingenuous-

ness which only waits to repose itself in the bosom of true friendship, the conflicts and escapes she had gone through at Woodlands.

"You acted nobly, my generous girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Melbourne, embracing her with tears of pleasure, "but oh! what a lesson of prudence, in this instance far surpassing my own, does your conduct give me! Misled by maternal affection, I only reflected at that time, that in my daughter I possessed a treasure which the highest might envy, and which, though it might derive from rank an added lustre, must, wherever I bestowed it, confer a greater obligation than it received. Under this impression, I rather viewed with pleasure the first dawnings of a partiality in Lord Strathallan, which I thought could only be productive of happiness to you both.

"Fortune has now placed an insuperable barrier between you, even if that engagement did not exist, which must now confine his choice. I will not remark

upon the injustice, the impolicy of thus fettering the mind before it is capable of making a free election. It is but too common, where any object of interest or ambition is concerned, and to such considerations the happiness of a life is often thought too cheap a sacrifice. Neither do I ask, if the impression made by those dangerous hours you were allowed to spend together, does not still linger about your heart. I anticipated your refusal of Sowerby, but I do not approve of your motive for it. Consider, my love, were affluence still added to those advantages, which I am sure no blind partiality tempts me to exaggerate, what right would he have to aspire to my Matilda? He himself pleads the reverse in your fortune, as the only circumstance that emboldens him to acknowledge a preference he has long in secret felt; while he declares, with a generous delicacy, it was the fear of influencing your choice by the parting recommendation of a parent, that prevented him from opening his intentions to his friend. On the whole, I am better pleased

with his conduct than I expected; but do not let the sense of obligation weigh upon your mind; neither on the other hand suppose, that a vain wish to be restored to the enjoyments of wealth, at your expense, has the slightest influence on the counsels I am giving you. Reflect before you decide; but I entreat, whatever be your final determination, that you will consider me as a person wholly unconnected with the question."

"I will consult my pillow upon it," said Matilda, attempting to smile, for she began to fear that the flattering suggestions of her own heart might have deceived her into believing, that that was a noble action, which was, in reality, only a sacrifice to disappointed passion.

Mrs. Melbourne having approved of her determination, with mutual expressions of anxiety for each other's happiness, and mutual endearments, which changed the hour of sorrow into one of bliss, these amiable sufferers parted from each other for the night.

CHAP. IV.

The morn that warns th' approaching day
Awakes me up to toil and woe,
I see the hours in long array
That I must suffer lingering slow:

Or, if I slumber, fancy chief
Reigns haggard-wild in sore affright,
Even day all bitter brings relief
From such a horror-breathing night.

BURNS, *Lament.*

THE hour of darkness, of silence, and solitude, which by the happy is consecrated to repose, Matilda devoted to serious enquiry into the nature of her own feelings. Though others may consider her as a beauty, a heroine, and till late, the object of envy as well as admiration, she was still old fashioned enough to know herself to be a poor, weak, erring creature. She did not forget that the heart is deceitful above all things, and she determined its dangerous dictates should not be sub-

stituted for the less pleasing, but safer decrees, of reason and religion. The result of this self-examination was, a resolution at once to conquer any repugnance that might be inconsistent with duty; and by a graceful compliance, to shew her gratitude to her truest friend, and to ensure the happiness of a mother, who had ever made hers the first object of her life.

The attachment Sowerby had shewn for Mrs. Melbourne, had touched her affectionate heart beyond any thing in his former conduct; his present disinterested offer added to the esteem with which he had ever inspired her. "I feel friendship, confidence, gratitude, towards him," she continued, "and after all, what is this love, without which I fondly imagine I cannot make him happy?"

At this instant, a long-forbidden image rushed before her fancy's eye,—bright, distinct, and visible, as reality could have made it. It was the beautiful form of the beloved Strathallan, which burst upon her soul, beaming in all those mild glories

which had led it captive in happier hours. Turning on her those soft eyes, which had learned so directly the channel to her heart, it seemed to look at her reproachfully, and say, "Do you still ask what is love?" "Oh, forgive me, Strathallan, I was in error—I repent!" cried Matilda, starting up, while her voice was drowned in the tears she could no longer suppress: "Surely you are mine,—I have been given to you,—your claim shall be admitted,—I will obey you, my gentle lord. But do not upbraid me," she added, panting under the strong impression of terror her imagination had conjured up, and trying to banish from her mind the form which was ever before it, seen, felt in the air, chaining her to one spot, and alone illuminating the surrounding gloom with its light. It appeared to her that he implored her not to desert him, to leave him without consolation in a loveless, joyless world; not to hasten of herself the destruction of his hopes. He seemed to ask her, if a short delay was

too much for one who had shewn such love?

But soon recovering from, and ashamed of the transport into which passion had led her, "Has he not resigned me?" she said; "Have I not myself pointed out to him the path he should pursue? And shall I now show myself incapable of a similar effort? Shall I, while he is perhaps successfully endeavouring to banish my image from his thoughts, still cherish his, in hopeless and cowardly despair? No, let this conflict, the most violent, be the last; let me repeal my former resolutions, and seek in duty that happiness, which ill-directed love can never give."

Having composed her mind to this determination, she waited with anxiety for the approach of morning, that she might make her mother's heart happy by communicating it; perhaps that she might put it out of her own power to retract it. She met her at breakfast with a countenance serene though pale.

"I have examined myself, my dear

mother," she said, "and I assure you, I can, with satisfaction, comply with the proposal that has been so generously made to me." "And I assure you," returned Mrs. Melbourne, while she pressed her with tenderness to her heart, "I will never consent to such a sacrifice."

Matilda, anxious to be understood, and fearful that she was not supposed in earnest in the wish she now expressed, repeated with eagerness the arguments by which she had brought her mind to such a determination. But Mrs. Melbourne continued firm to her original resolution. "I allowed you time to reflect upon the offer thus unexpectedly made," she said, "because I thought it necessary your refusal should be the result of deliberate consideration, in order to satisfy your own mind that we neither of us suddenly rejected it on rash or romantic grounds. But I was determined, even should a false generosity lead you to sacrifice such youth and merit to a temper and age like Sowerby's, under the idea of contributing

to my happiness, that I never would consent to it."

Matilda insisted, and a contest of generosity ensued between the parent and child, most unlike those which are generally represented; but which we may surely trust to be of more frequent occurrence, than those conflicts so often described as taking place between aversion on the one side, and tyranny on the other, when we consider, that the heart, generally painted the abode of the latter, is that which in reality is capable of tenderness, generosity, and self-devotion, beyond what all other hearts conceive. Matilda was obliged, at last, we will not ask whether with reluctance, to yield.

"We cannot hope any thing from Sowerby's friendship, after this," continued Mrs. Melbourne; "offended pride, in a mind like his, is likely to settle deep, and to rankle long; but do not let this affect you," she pursued, kindly pressing her hand, "the sale of my jewels, and the various personal property your poor father

left, will be enough to support us decently, though in a situation far different from that in which we have lived. Your amiable temper and merit have made you friends; you will, I hope, find more. At all events I am blest, to see in you a disposition to that contentment and resignation, which would make many, more favoured by fortune, could they look within, envy us in our humble habitation."

Sowerby did not long delay his return, in order to know how far he might indulge those hopes which had been the delightful dream of his life, but which he had never till lately aspired to realise. Mrs. Melbourne had a long conversation with him; and Matilda almost repented that she had suffered her mother's delicate generosity to prevail, and thus expose her to the pain and regret it now might cause her.

She waited in the front room of their little lodging, in that unsettled state of mind, and agitation of spirits, common to those who are conscious that something

is taking place in which they are intimately concerned, yet over which they no longer possess any influence. The figure of Sowerby darting from the house across the street, was the first object that roused her from this reverie. She hastened to the room where her mother had been; she was at the door, her handkerchief was at her eyes: "How I have wronged him!" she said, "He is the most generous of beings! he was indeed the worthy friend of the best of men."

Then retiring with Matilda, she related to her, that much as her friend had seemed to suffer from the rejection of his suit, his greatest anxiety had appeared to be, lest this imprudent disclosure of his attachment would take from him the right of being considered any longer with that confidence which he had formerly enjoyed. "As Mr. Melbourne's friend," he said, "let me still be allowed to contribute to the happiness of his family, though no longer hoping to be united to it by a dearer tie."

"I cannot repeat to you," continued Mrs. Melbourne, "the generosity of his offers; he seems better acquainted with the unhappy affairs of our family, even than I am myself; he talks of leaving all his possessions to you; and in the warmth of his friendly zeal for your welfare, he pressed me to let him settle upon you, entirely out of his own power, that portion of his fortune which, had you been united to him, he would have made yours."

An expression of alarm which she could not repress, passed over Matilda's countenance, and inclined her to interrupt Mrs. Melbourne's narration; but meeting her eye, she blushed at having for a moment suspected the determination of a spirit as delicate, and as proud as her own.

"Trust me, my dear," said that lady, answering her thoughts, "I could not bring myself to accept of any of Sowerby's pecuniary offers; but at the same time that I refused them, I conveyed to him

the high sense I entertained of the generosity and kindness by which they were prompted. His heart felt the distinction, and I may promise you, that you have secured, for ever, a warm and steady friend."

Matilda's tears evinced how capable she was of appreciating such an attachment; and her mother, to relieve her mind from the subject, began talking over their future plans of life; the manner in which they must now economize upon their narrow income, and the changes necessary to be made in the establishment they had formerly kept up.

"We must learn to attend upon ourselves," she said; "one man and a maid would, I think, have been sufficient for our small family, but that my own woman, Hanway, who has shewn herself as attached and respectful, as Susan was the contrary, has entreated not to be dismissed from a family where she has so long lived in happiness; she offers to turn to any sort of work, rather than be sent away;

and I, for my part, have been so affected by her generosity, that I would rather inconvenience myself, than either part from her, or make her suffer too much at her advanced age, by her inconsiderate kindness."

"Faithful creature!" cried Matilda, delighted with this new proof of attachment in an old servant, who she knew had not only welcomed her, but Mrs. Melbourne, into the world. "As to the other maid, mamma, we shall want one that will be active and clever, and I will take care it shall not be Susan."

Pursuant to this intention, she sent up for her own maid that evening, and said to her, "I think, Susan, you complained yesterday of wanting a bonnet?" "Yes, ma'am—no, ma'am," answered the girl, with a look that implied trepidation and self-reproach. "It was never our intention, I am sure," pursued Matilda, "that you should have been put to any inconvenience for want of money, though the harassing events that have

happened to us in succession, might, for the moment, have made your just claim escape my mother's memory. Here," she continued, taking out her purse, "is what I believe will satisfy your demand, and take this in addition," pressing on her a handsome gratuity, "as an acknowledgment of the cheerful services you used to render me; and as I am no longer in a situation to require them ——"

"Oh, ma'am," cried poor Susan, bursting into tears, "take back your money I beg, and forgive me, for I was a very foolish, insolent girl, yesterday, and a wicked ungrateful wretch, to speak so to my sweet young lady, who never said an unkind word in her life. Punish me, pray do, ma'am, but don't talk of sending me away."

"But my dear Susan," said Matilda, quite softened by the girl's repentance and confession, "our present circumstances put it out of my power to keep a separate attendant for myself, and you are not used to any other employment."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I am," cried the poor creature sobbing, "and so you will let me be with you wherever you may go, I'll be housemaid—I'll be cook-maid—I'll wash the rooms upon my knees, or do any thing, so you will but forgive me."

Matilda looked at her with a compassion which was evidently the precursor of pardon. She was touched by the sincere expression of shame and grief, that was betrayed alike in the words and countenance of this well-meaning, simple creature. At a loss how to proceed, she consulted with her mother; who, pleased with this artless tribute to her daughter's mild virtues, warmly counselled her to prefer the girl to a stranger, since she was so willing to repair her fault, and so desirous to be useful.

Mrs. Melbourne and Matilda, with this small establishment of three servants, and inhabiting part of a house in a genteel but retired street in London, fixed their minds to accept with thankfulness the good that remained to them, and deter-

mined, since they had preferred delicacy and independence, to the prospect of affluence, when incompatible with those considerations, not to afford, by any future regrets, a new example in their own conduct, of the inconsistency of human wishes.

CHAP. V.

I'll beg one boon
And then be gone and trouble you no more.
Shall I obtain it?
Name it, fair cousin.

SHAKESPEARE.

SOWERBY, in resigning the character of a lover, had resumed, with increased warmth, his former attentions as a friend. He seemed only desirous that it might be forgotten he had ever aspired to a higher place in Matilda's esteem; and so perfectly did he succeed in making her feel once more at ease in his society, that the charm of her artless manners and affectionate frankness communicated itself to him, and he dictated and dogmatized, quarrelled and asked pardon, with all his former good-humoured assumption of authority. Since his return to town he had taken a lodging near

Mrs. Melbourne, and seemed determined not to forsake her till the first shock of adversity at least was past.

As soon as that lady was able to attend to any thing beyond the afflicting circumstances of her present situation, she yielded to her daughter's persuasions in inquiring after the interesting sister of Mr. Sowerby, who had been Matilda's fellow-traveller; but nothing could conquer her reluctance to receive the visit of a stranger; and on Mrs. Melbourne's expressing to Sowerby her surprise that a woman of manners so pleasing as Matilda described hers to be, should be so devoted to solitude, and so indifferent to the interest she involuntarily inspired, he replied, in his abrupt manner,—"It is because my sister is a nun."

"A nun!—How singular that you should never mention the circumstance before!"

"Very singular."

Mrs. Melbourne easily comprehended from these concise replies, that her old

friend was not to be questioned on this subject; but as the curiosity of ladies, once raised, is not so easily appeased, she, by persevering attentions, at length induced Clara to make an exception in her favour from her plan of perfect seclusion, and soon learned from the fair recluse herself a little more of her history.

It appeared she had been educated in the Romish persuasion, which was that of her mother, the father of Mr. Sowerby having married a lady of immense fortune who was of that communion. She was considerably younger than her brother, and had, in the bloom of youth, voluntarily returned to the convent in France, where she had been brought up, and there assumed the veil. When that country no longer offered a safe asylum, she had been conducted by her brother to a similar institution in England, where, for several years, she had remained contentedly performing the duties enjoined by her profession, till her extremely rigorous observance of them, acting on a

naturally delicate frame, brought on an illness which occasioned such serious apprehensions for her life, that she had been recommended to try the effects of a change of air, and some relaxation in the severity of her former discipline. So far her present situation could be accounted for; but the reasons that had induced the fair nun, possessed of beauty and enjoying a large fortune, originally to take such a step, were still withheld. Clara's manners were frank, even affectionate,

> "And her mild eye was eloquent to speak
> "The soul of pity;"

yet still, mingled with this softness and apparent confidence, there was a degree of reserve; and whether the veil was drawn by caution or sorrow, Mrs. Melbourne equally felt it was too sacred to attempt to remove it. It was certain that her resolution had been taken contrary to the wishes of Sowerby. His constant hatred to whatever bore the name of French manners or education, and that

unwillingness to speak upon the subject, which, after an intimacy of so many years, had still made it a secret to his friends, that he had a sister, proved how much her self-devotion pained him. Even now, when in company with her, an involuntary and fretful glance, where pity and interest seemed mingled with some distressing feeling of resentment and regret, shewed that the consciousness of her situation was never absent from his bosom.

An observation like this was sufficient for prudence, such as Mrs. Melbourne's; while Matilda, enjoying the present hour in Clara's innocent and amiable society, feared, lest in attempting to know more, she should, with the indiscretion of the imprudent Psyche, suddenly deprive herself of the advantages she already possessed. The fair recluse spent many hours of each day with her, and in her company she felt an ease even beyond what she now experienced with Mrs. Melbourne.

There are times when the members of

the same family, from the very excess of the affection which unites them, cannot so freely unbosom to each other, those sorrows in which they take an equal share, as to some friend who feels a kind, but less lively interest in their distress; a kind of restraint and timidity reigns over those conversations, where each is anxious to avoid some subject the most painful to touch upon, yet the most present to the thoughts. With Clara, Matilda could spend hours in a luxurious melancholy, which at all other moments she feared to indulge, and with her could pay the tribute of affection to the virtues of the parent who was lost to her on earth indeed, but whose image was seldom absent from her memory, and never from her heart.

The death of Mr. Melbourne was found to be productive of other distresses to his family, than those to which they had at first adverted. The confusion in which his affairs were left, rendered it necessary they should have an interview with Sir

Harold Melbourne, the present possessor of the Rocks. It could not be supposed but that such a meeting must revive painful feelings; and it was with no great satisfaction that Mrs. Melbourne heard of his arrival in town, and saw the day approach which was to introduce to her, at once, a relation and a perfect stranger.

As if the disposition, studious yet indolent, of the late possessor of the Rocks, had been foreseen by his ancestor, he held the estate on the condition of appropriating a part of the yearly income it afforded, to the purpose of keeping the mansion in repair; and adding to it such embellishments as time or taste might suggest. This sum, though not turned by Mr. Melbourne very much from its original destination, was yet employed in a manner to which his provident and wise progenitor had perhaps never adverted. The first year he came into possession of the estate he built a menagerie; the next, an observatory; and finding afterwards that the rooms of his house

were not laid out on a plan sufficiently extensive to contain the numerous foreign curiosities of various sorts that now began to crowd in upon him, he proceeded to dismantle some of the rooms, and to take down part of the old walls, in order to convert the materials into other erections more suitable to his taste.

It was at this period that his wife had ventured to remonstrate, and to remind him, that while he was intent upon these fanciful plans, which neither added to the beauty nor convenience of the mansion, he was letting the greater part of the original building fall to ruin, and diverting the money that was destined to repair it, into another channel.

Struck with this representation, he promised immediately to attend to it; that year his museum would be finished, and he would positively make no more additions to it. In the beginning of the following, however, temptation arrived in the shape of an American bison, of a size

so uncommon, and so beautifully preserved, that Mr. Melbourne, not having a corner left for it in the apartment already erected, declared he must be allowed to begin another room, or at least a boudoir, for the bison.

In the ensuing year Mrs. Melbourne still hoped some alteration in his plans; but he was then deeply engaged building a conservatory for Matilda, and after that he decidedly would think of the dilapidations the mansion had endured. The conservatory was built, and it was at length determined that the work should soon be begun of restoring the family-seat to its ancient appearance; when the slow but sure prognostics of a dangerous complaint, warned its possessor that he might not have it in his power to do his heir the justice that he meditated.

Fully aware of his danger, his intention had been to reimburse him in his will, for the sums thus appropriated, by a part of the fortune he had formerly considered as exclusively laid by for Matilda.

The sudden stroke, which at once deprived him of this resource, embittered his last moments, by putting it out of his power to do what honour, if not justice, required; but Mrs. Melbourne, who well knew his wishes, determined to make any exertion or suffer any privation, rather than let obloquy rest upon the memory of one whose only real fault was, perhaps, a too great contempt for money matters, and a careless procrastination in the final arrangement of his affairs, increased, no doubt, by the apparent facility of retrieving them, which the probability till lately held out, of a long and undisturbed life, afforded. She had resources on which she hoped she could rely. Delay was all she required of Sir Harold, to satisfy his demands; but delay might even be considered as a favour—and a favour it was painful to ask, from one whose family had been at enmity with her late husband.

This repugnance was not lessened by Sowerby, who rather seemed to take a

strange delight in adding to her apprehensions.—"You will get no good out of Sir Harold, I promise you," said he; "a wild rogue, I wonder he is not here already to worry for the money."

"I am inclined to hope better of him," observed the lady; "the very circumstance of his having chosen to become the purchaser of poor Mr. Melbourne's collections, argues a mind not entirely given up to dissipation."

"Not at all. That was just in character with a hasty, feather-headed Melbourne, as they all were. He knew the collection was *unique* in England, and therefore, though he had no use for it himself, he would not let it go out of the family to those who could have valued it better. He a superior mind! There never was one among them; they are a bad breed; there was always something odd in the family—the father, old Sir Reginald, was something odd—the son is something odd—the Melbournes are a bad breed!"

"You forget, my dear sir, we are

Melbournes—at least I claim the honour of——"

"Oh, you know very well I do not mean you.—The Melbournes of the Rocks were always pure, as the healthful air that surrounded their charming retirement,—but as for the Melbournes of Moss-cliff Abbey—all I can say is, what few will feel inclined to deny I believe,—that the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of the Rocks will long have reason to regret their change of masters. Matilda, child, why do you hold down your head, and look as if you were going to cry? I am afraid I vex you—I think I always vex you," continued Sowerby, in a half angry tone, to conceal the real repentance he felt at the thought of having given her pain.

Mrs. Melbourne took this opportunity to enquire if he had any thing, more than common report, to justify the opinion he had taken up, of Sir Harold.

"It is the result of every thing I have picked up about him since I have been in this vile place, this London, this sink of

iniquity. His mother, a mere worthless fine lady, seemed to take a perverse pleasure in giving him an early initiation into all those follies by which she had rendered herself so notorious. When he ought to have been at school, she had him in company with her at balls and parties. When he ought to have been at college, he was driving barouches, acting private plays, losing his money at White's, and making himself talked of in every region of frivolity and folly. When he ought to have been in the world he was at college, beating the tutors, spending much, getting little, except the name of a ruffian, added to that of a trifler;—and when he ought to have been in parliament, he was abroad, wasting his time, confirming his follies, and neglecting his improvement. At an incredible expense and trouble, he got permission to run over the continent, merely for the indulgence of a caprice; his tour was cut short by the illness of his father, who summoned him to return: he travelled through France and Italy in

an incredibly short time, and killed I don't know how many post-horses, by which means he embarked for England, soon enough to see his father, and be with him a few hours before he died; and this was the only time in his life he was where he ought to be. After Sir Reginald's death his character took quite a new turn. He became gloomy, fond of solitude, and shut himself up like a prisoner, in Moss-cliff Abbey. Many strange stories were circulated of his way of life there, and his reasons for this utter seclusion: I see in it nothing but the natural effect of an education such as he had received, and of his being the favourite son of such a woman as Lady Julia Melbourne. He was satiated with dissipation, before he had time to lay a foundation of solid acquirements, sufficient to make him play his part on the great theatre of the world with advantage and credit, and therefore, he shrunk from the duties his station required; and though equally unfit for solitude, sought it as a refuge which would

conceal at once his incapacity and discontent."

"What a character!" exclaimed Mrs. Melbourne, as she looked at her daughter with uneasiness; "my aversion to see this man hourly increases."

"Could I see him for you, mamma?" said Matilda, "and save you this unpleasant conversation."

"*You* see him, child! what do you know about business? and we meet upon nothing else."

"I think I could learn to say any thing you wish," replied the affectionate girl.

Mrs. Melbourne, considering that these were affairs, in which her daughter's interests were as intimately concerned as her own, and that it might be perhaps advantageous to her, to see and converse with a relation, whose countenance would be a protection, whose enmity a source of distress, as soon as she found herself alone, turned in her mind this offer, which she at length determined to accept; while

Matilda, on her part, from the extreme love she bore her mother, and her anxious desire to save her a moment's pain, exerted her attention so successfully to become mistress of a subject, till now altogether new to her, that she was as competent as Mrs. Melbourne to discuss it, and could descant without embarrassment on debts, arrears, and repairs, long before the arrival of the dreaded Sir Harold.

He was punctual to his appointment; and it was with a beating heart that Matilda, on hearing of his arrival, prepared to appear before him. How much was she surprised then, to see in this "ruffian," this gamester, this solitary and savage Sir Harold, a man of the most interesting appearance, and the mildest and most captivating address. The baronet was still young—but, in his anxious and grief-marked countenance, sickness or affliction seemed to have anticipated the effects of time. His person was graceful, but tall and slight in the extreme; it seemed to bend to every passing breeze. His

features were at once, marked and elegant; his smile, of uncommon sweetness; and when the hectic of a moment lighted them up with that fine but fearful glow, which so surely announces the destroyer within, the exquisite perfection of their almost feminine beauty, irresistibly reminded her of what she now recollected to have *often* heard as the general remark, that he was the living image of the late celebrated and lovely Lady Julia Melbourne.

Sir Harold, on his part, could not behold, unmoved, the charms of the young relative, to whom he now for the first time was introduced: the mourning she still wore for the death of her father, only shewed to more advantage by its simplicity, the graceful proportions of her form; and when, in a voice, made tremulous by painful remembrance and present emotion, she apologised for her mother's absence, on the ground of her spirits being yet unequal for the discussion of the affairs on which they met, he thought he had never heard a sound so plaintive and

so sweet. He listened with the greatest attention to the detail she gave of the late Mr. Melbourne's embarrassments; but when she came to mention the composition she had for the present to propose, and the period that she required to be granted before the final settlement of his affairs, Sir Harold interrupted her, to beg she would not think him capable of taking advantage of Mrs. Melbourne's generosity and high sense of honour to urge claims which, if ever valid, were from that moment annulled.—That if he did not regret their existence, it was solely from the consideration that they had been the means of introducing him to a family, from whom he had been too long estranged. He spoke handsomely of the late Mr. Melbourne, and expressed a hope, when her spirits would admit it, that he might be allowed to assure his widow in person, of the esteem he had ever felt for her character. Delighted with goodness and consideration so unexpected, Matilda ventured now to indulge the plea-

sure, (unknown to those whose families have experienced no division) that arises from the acquisition of a relative, and the removal of a painful prejudice. There was an energy, yet an artless dignity, preserved in the expressions her gratitude suggested, that charmed and surprised Sir Harold.

When every thing had been settled in the manner best calculated for the accommodation and advantage of Mrs. Melbourne; when all that could be urged and suggested on the subject, had been urged and suggested over and over, he sat silent, yet still unwilling to rise; his eyes fixed on that enchanting countenance, and apparently waiting, in hopes that some observation might fall from those lips, that might afford him a pretext for a longer stay.

At length Matilda broke up the conference, saying, "I think, sir, it is time my mother should be informed of the result of this conversation; believe me, she will feel your behaviour as I do—as"— She was

proceeding,—her cousin again interrupted her, said he had many more things to propose, which he should reserve for another interview; and assuming the privilege of a relation, slightly to kiss her hand, withdrew; leaving her filial heart rejoiced in the consciousness, that what had passed would be productive to her mother of a peace of mind, to which she had been lately a stranger.

When Sowerby heard of Sir Harold's visit to the house, he was anxious, but with no very benevolent curiosity, to be informed of the event; for, being one of those who would

> "'Rather chuse that 'you' should die
> Than his prediction prove a lie:'

he had already disposed in his own mind what it should be; and abruptly accosted Matilda with—"So, child, you found that young Melbourne very impracticable."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Melbourne, "he is all goodness; and I congratulate myself on having acquired a valuable relation."

"Pressing and unreasonable in his demands, hey?"

"So far from it, he has behaved with all the kindness of a brother, the liberality of a friend."

"Ay, ay," continued Sowerby, following the train of his own reflections, "a man of the world, a mere man of the world! You found him very harsh and unpleasant, Matilda, did you not?"

"My dear sir, you have formed a strange idea of my cousin's manners; to me they appear to have a softness, an excess of gentleness, bordering, if any thing, upon effeminacy—they are sometimes almost dejected; but for any thing like rudeness or want of feeling, it seems the most opposite to the character of Sir Harold Melbourne."

"At least you will not deny me," growled the censor, glaring on her with eyes, that, at this moment, much better answered to the expression he made use of, "that he *looks* like a ruffian, as he is."

Mrs. Melbourne, recollecting the de-



scription her daughter had just been giving her, of the prepossessing, but too delicate appearance of Sir Harold, could hardly suppress a smile, while Matilda ventured to express her dissent.

"I can only say then," (concluded Sowerby) "that he must be possessed of a cursed deal of deceit and assurance, to contrive to appear so completely the reverse of what he really is."

The recent visit had not been productive of less satisfaction to Sir Harold, than to his fair cousin. Never (in his opinion) had he beheld loveliness till now. Bred up with the same prejudices against Mr. Melbourne's part of the family, that they had been against his, he had understood that "old Melbourne," who was an oddity, had educated a little daughter to be his exact counterpart, and had accordingly fancied his young relative a compound of all that was ugly, affected, and disagreeable.

Some one, whom he had met with accidentally, mentioned her as pretty, which

a little softened his judgment respecting her; but for such a union of beauty, dignity, and elegance, as had burst upon his sight, he was wholly unprepared; and it had accordingly produced an impression, at once made softer by repentance, and stronger by surprise.

"Your doctor's gown becomes you infinitely, my little Portia!" said Mrs. Melbourne, delighted to be relieved from the load of anxiety with which she had expected this interview, "but have a care Sir Harold does not fall in love with the doctor, if not with the doctor's clerk, and even be induced perhaps to offer him the ring."

Matilda, blushing, denied with eagerness the imputation, and never would allow her mother, in the frequent ensuing visits of her cousin, to hint again of such a possibility.

Mrs. Melbourne, however, preserved her opinion, and observed with a secret delight, not perhaps the less lively because it *was* secret, the growing partiality

that was expressed in every look and action of Sir Harold. In one respect, his visits were rather inconvenient; during the day they were short, languid, and uninteresting; but, if he called late, his spirits, which rose towards night, rendered him equally capable of enlivening, and unwilling to relinquish such enchanting society. From him they understood that partly for pleasure, and partly in search of health, he had visited, and made some stay in the capitals of Spain and Portugal; the opposite coasts of Fez and Morocco had been objects of curiosity to him, and he had not omitted visiting the more classical scenes of France and Italy. He had a considerable talent, without fatiguing attention, of making the scenes he had passed through, contribute to the variety of conversation; at other times, leaving the plain track of description or narrative, he loved to seize upon some argument, the more fanciful or untenable the better; and building upon it his own superstructure, would indulge in a thousand imagina-

tions, which amused by their oddity, and sometimes even by their very absurdity; but these were only occasional starts. He would frequently entertain Mrs. Melbourne with grave plans of the various improvements he meditated at the Rocks. These he always concluded with a sigh, and an implied wish that she would witness them. Suddenly these improvements, which were to take up years, seemed forgotten, and nothing so much captivated his fancy as the pleasures of travelling; then again every thing was deemed insipid, in comparison with the advantages of reading and learned retirement. While he alternately took up or dismissed these various ideas, with a rapidity and vivacity peculiarly his own, the excessive brightness and fire which flashed from his eyes, joined to his hectic uncertain colour, and emaciated appearance, strongly realised that idea, of a mind too active for the slight frame which enclosed it, that is conveyed in the French expression, "la lame use le fourreau." But at times this

flash and animation would fly, his eye lost its lustre, and a look of unutterable, unexplained, helpless anguish, seemed to own that all subjects to him equally uninteresting, were only the resources of a spirit "with itself at war;" which endeavoured, in the sportive windings of fancy, to wander from some stern reality that incessantly pursued it. Still he was pleasing, and even Sowerby, who had been the most prejudiced against him, soon became reconciled to his society.

It was remarked, that however agreeably engaged before, his spirits invariably drooped after twelve o'clock; yet did he always seem more desirous to prolong his stay, the less he became capable of contributing to the amusement of the party.

"This poor man," Mrs. Melbourne one day observed to her daughter, "always puts me in mind of Johnson, of whom it is related that when parting at night he used to exclaim 'you go to rest, but I to misery.'"

To this, Matilda could not help assenting; particularly when she noticed the intreating look, which he sometimes cast at her mother, after the forbidden time, for one little half hour longer; and the artful manner in which he would steal out his watch, put it back, and then appeal to the *ladies* if it did not want a considerable time of their usual hour for retiring to rest.

Sir Harold, though he had not yet declared himself, in his every look and word so much evinced the lover, that even the modest Matilda could no longer misunderstand the nature of his attentions, or the cause of his visits; and Mrs. Melbourne, though she still referred her daughter to the ultimate decisions of her own heart, yet evidently shewed that this was a prospect which she viewed with more partial pleasure, than that of her union with Sowerby. In this there appeared nothing to which a reasonable objection could be made; here was youth, worth, and honour, united to fortune and consequence,

as high as her hopes could aspire to; this union would at once cement the friendship of two branches of a family, of equal though perhaps different merit, and restore Mrs. Melbourne, in a great measure, to the peace, the affluence, almost the very situation, she had lost.

This representation Matilda made very fairly to her own heart, and asked it, if every duty, every advantage, did not conspire to command her to accept Sir Harold; that heart still replied in the negative, without even deigning to assign any reason for so unconditional a refusal. Why am I lower and more wretched, she would ask herself, at the moment that rank and fortune once more seem to be offered to my view, than many hours in which I foresaw only indigence and obscurity? I think I perceive the reason; does not the firmness, the spirit, which we sometimes feel arise within us, to meet adversity, the sinking and dejection we experience at the moment of some offered pleasure or happiness, prove that the en-

joyment is not suited to our nature, and that pain and suffering are its more congenial habits?

Matilda was mistaken; the prospect presented to her, no happiness; and could she have followed the emotions of her heart unreproved, she would have preferred the humblest lot with the freedom of choice, to wealth and splendour with Sir Harold; but to sacrifice the emotions of that heart to the happiness of one, who was dearer to her than life itself, was now become her first principle. An accidental communication, however, soon made her consider her present entanglement in a different and more alarming point of view.

CHAP. VI.

Maiden, a nameless life I lead,
A nameless death I'll die:
The fiend whose lanthorn lights the mead
Were better mate than I.

SCOTT.—*Rokeby*.

"SIR Harold stays very late, ma'am," said old Hanway, one day, as she was dressing her lady, or rather standing, with her arms across, seeing her lady dress.

Mrs. Melbourne, who always liked this freedom of conversation in an old and worthy domestic, whom she now considered much more in the light of a friend, replied with good-humour to her remark, which encouraged her to add,—"To be sure I'm angry with people in common for keeping up the house so late; but I think nothing of sitting up for Sir Harold, because he's a relation—and because," she added, with a significant wink, "it's

easy to see what he comes for. Well, I hope he'll make the poor child happy," she continued, looking with an expression of fondness and anxiety at Matilda, "I hope he'll make her happy!"

"And why should you doubt it, Hanway?" said Mrs. Melbourne, not quite pleased with the manner in which her words were accented.

"Oh, no reason, ma'am—only Mr. Franklin, his man, *does* say he is a comical gentleman."

"How!—comical? You must explain yourself."

Here Hanway took a fit of wonderful discretion; but at length she was brought to own that it was said he did a number of comical things on going to take possession of the Rocks. "You know, ma'am," (Hanway's usual way of telling her mistress every thing she did not know) "he sent most of his servants away before he left the Abbey; and writ to Anstey to hire new ones at the Rocks, so that they was all ready to receive him.

He arrived there himself at eleven o'clock at night, and then—Mr. Franklin says this, not I—he went directly down stairs, made a terrible to-do, abused the butler, beat the cook, and knocked the plates and dishes about their heads, and all for not having his dinner ready for him, he said.—'Lord, sir,' says she, 'your honour should have given orders, if you meant to have dinner at this hour of the night.' However they began laying the cloth in the great parlour, when his honour threw the knives and table-cloth on the floor, and asked them how they could think of having it in such a place.—'Why where would you please to have it, sir?' said the footman.—'At the top of that rock, to be sure,' said his honour; and leading the way through the grounds, he clambered up to the top of one of the highest crags as nimble as a squirrel, and there stood triumphing over 'em like as if he had said—'Here am I above you all.' But soon not liking such a dark, dismal place, as I take it, he ordered the

dinner all back again into the parlour, and began eating, as hungry as you please. He did so; but the minute the clock struck twelve he dropped down in a sort of fit; and then, when he recovered, he says,—'Carry me away; I can't stay here,' and so locked himself up in his own room, and a quiet house they had of it till morning. Well then, very early, they heard a kind of rustling and tumbling things about. This was their master running up and down stairs, and into the rooms, and looking at every thing very curious like; and then he called to him William Anstey, the old steward, that he had said he would keep on at the Rocks.—'William Anstey,' says he, 'you need not say any thing of my little fit last night; and now I want to see Mr. Melbourne's collection, that I ordered to be purchased for me, and the museum.'—And so he looked very earnest at the stuffed beasts, and then at the birds, and afterwards opened their glass cases,—'Fly away,' says he; 'I give you liberty.'

Then he began for to sigh piteously, and to add,—'Oh that I had the wings of a dove, and could fly away like you! but I am confined,' says he, 'confined to one stated round,' I think he said. Then, when he went to the real birdery, where the birds from foreign parts were singing and hopping about, all alive, pretty creatures!—'William,' he says, 'I won't have all this waste; for you see this quantity of grains and seeds you buy for these animals, which is no use, for they're all stuffed.'—'Lord bless you, sir!' cries the steward, 'these an't stuffed, but as pretty little live things as your eye would wish to see.'—'Are they so?' says Sir Harold, 'then have a couple of them roasted for my supper.'"

"Well, and what more?" said Matilda, perceiving that Hanway had stopped, feeling the symptoms approaching of another fit of discretion. It was with some difficulty she was persuaded to open her mouth again, and then she began with sundry wise observations that "Par-

sons said many more things, Heaven knows, than was true," and that "'twould be better if they made it a rule to hear, see, and say nothing;" but soon proceeding with that increased rapidity which is observed in a carriage the moment the drag is taken off and it gets on level ground again, she continued,—"they say he did still comicaler things on coming up to London. When he was to go to court, on coming to his estate, his man could not get him to put on any thing but an old shabby blue coat, and strings in his shoes. However, next Sunday he went to church in a very fine coat indeed, with diamond buttons, and said he'd no notion of being finer in the presence of a temporal king, than in that of the eternal King of the whole world. But he is a very good-natured gentleman, and a very generous gentleman, Mr. Franklin says; and so charitable that he gives to every beggar he sees; and if he meets with a poor little boy, idling, or cursing and swearing, and seeming neglected like,

he orders him to be sent home and fed and clothed at his own expense, and sends him to school."

"Well, Hanway, that's no harm at least," observed Mrs. Melbourne.

"No, to be sure, ma'am, no harm but good. I wou'dn't say any harm of Sir Harold for the world; though he did make me laugh, going one day to the blacksmith's, and ordering home dozens of ices; then, when he went to the confectioner's, he desired him to make him a saddle, and such like whimsies; but to be sure, a fine young gentleman, with a fine estate, does not come every day now-a-days; and he may be very wise and clever, and that, for all he's a little odd at times."

Matilda was surprised she had not remarked, before, any great singularity in Sir Harold's general manner and conversation. She certainly remembered having once noticed the strangeness of his reply, to an observation she made, upon his telling her that he had gone one cam-

paign with the army. She said he must have suffered great privations.—"No," he answered, "it was amusing—very amusing." But on mentioning a *fête* to which he had been invited, he remarked he should not go—for that the labour and exertion would be intolerable. These, however, might be mere singularities of expression, not very uncommon, but the account she now received, excited the most serious apprehensions.

"Whatever appearance this narration may give, of his suffering under some enation of mind," said Mrs. Melbourne, "as it is a misfortune from which I am certain your family is free, I am willing to believe there may be some exaggeration in these accounts; but fear nothing, my love," she continued, observing the alarm expressed in Matilda's looks, "Sir Harold may labour under some individual affection; and it is a point on which I would obtain the clearest satisfaction, before I would trust the welfare and safety of my child, to a man who perhaps can-

not answer a moment for his own. But how clear up the doubt?"

Mrs. Melbourne proposed that, as even considering him only as a relation, they must be interested in his behalf, Matilda should write to Lady Torrendale and Miss Ferrars, who both lived near his new abode; and mention, incidentally, the present possessor of the Rocks; which, as the newest topic, would no doubt draw out every particular that was known, concerning his character and conduct.

Matilda felt a repugnance to this step; she had written once already to Lady Torrendale, briefly informing her of her late misfortunes, and altered situation. She had received no answer; and was unwilling by another, perhaps, equally unsuccessful, attempt, to verify the fears which, from some expressions that had escaped her mother, she had been lately led to adopt. From Arbella she had less to apprehend; that young lady had already written her two letters, filled with expressions of her warm, though rather

inconsiderate sympathy; to her, therefore, she first addressed herself; and then resolved, in this as in every other case, to yield up her will and wishes to those of her mother. She once more wrote to the Countess of Torrendale, and determined to wait patiently, or at least as patiently as she could, the event.

"No post to-day!" These were the words which Matilda was obliged to repeat morning after morning to Mrs. Melbourne; and which, as confirming her fears of the indifference of her late friends, struck still colder on that lady's heart, than on that of her daughter.

It has been observed that country correspondents often complain of the neglect of their friends in town, but that town friends never make the same reproach to those they have left in the country; surely this remark is not meant to apply, when the people in the country happen to be possessed of fortune or consequence, and those in town are blessed with neither.

At length, on the same day, two packets arrived; they were from Lady Torrendale and Miss Ferrars. Matilda resolved that, on this occasion, tried kindness should have the precedence of rank, and first opened that of Arbella. The account it gave of Sir Harold exactly agreed with Hanway's statement, and even added particulars illustrative of still greater extravagancies; but the conclusion of the letter was what most surprised and affected Matilda. Much as she had avoided to hint that they now suffered any material inconvenience by their change of circumstances, enough had been discovered, by the penetration of the delicate and generous Arbella, to convince her that her friend's present situation was far from what she wished it. She inclosed a draft upon her banker, for five hundred pounds, which she entreated her to accept for her own and her mother's use; adding, that though they might have no real necessity for such a sum, upon the final arrangement of their affairs,

there was always at first, upon any change in a family, debts and demands to satisfy that were unexpected, and that might make a small supply of ready money at the time more grateful than a much larger one at a future period. She observed in conclusion, lest her dear Matilda should imagine she had put her to any inconvenience, that it was a nothing, a mere windfall, to which she had herself no positive right, as it was the produce of a little sum which her cousin, "pretty Sam," as she often jocosely termed him, had turned for her in the stocks; and happening to be fortunate, had thought to surprise her with its amount as an agreeable birth-day present.

Miss Melbourne well knew how to appreciate the consideration that led her friend to enter into these details; and the manner in which this accommodation was offered, (for she secretly determined it should be no more than a temporary accommodation) constituted by far its greatest value.

The letter from Lady Torrendale we shall transcribe, not so much for the intrinsic value of the matter it contained, as from its affording a good specimen of her ladyship's manner, and the qualifications she possessed for epistolary excellence.

Crescent, Buxton.

"The accounts I received of my "dear Miss Melbourne's sufferings, during the period that has intervened since "I had last the pleasure of her society, "have penetrated me with the sincerest "and most poignant regret; I make no "doubt, however, that she will experience "relief, from that spirit of contentment "and resignation, which renders even the "greatest distresses perfectly easy to be "endured.

"I trust my dear Matilda has long ere "this attributed my silence, not to un-"kindness, but to its true cause, illness; "the most distressing, complicated, and "severe. I was first seized with a nervous

"sickness, lassitude, and giddiness in my "head, which deprived me of the power "of attention, and rendered all employ-"ment impossible; an affection in my "eyes attacked me at the same time, "which made them wander, see every "thing in a wrong light, and be perfectly "incapable of fixing upon a book. Then, "I was tormented with little floating "specks perpetually dancing before me; "and then these little floating specks were "changed into diamonds; and these "squares or diamonds again, into little "fantastic figures, green, blue, and yel-"low; with a thousand other nervous "appearances, indescribable and insup-"portable. I had an universal tremor, "and a noise in my head; sometimes of "people whispering, sometimes of drums "and trumpets sounding, sometimes again "of carriages rolling, or knocks at the "door, so as to be entirely deprived of "rest.

"Just as I began to get the better of "these dreadful symptoms, I accidentally

"sprained my ancle, waltzing with that "excessively handsome young Irishman "Lord Kilcare, and this accident, by con-"fining me for some time to my couch, "completed the ruin of my health. I was "advised to have hot water pumped upon "my foot, and afterwards to try the hot "springs of Matlock and Buxton; but "as neither succeeded, Bath was recom-"mended. It is my native place; and I "am sure, were Lord Torrendale a man "of the slightest humanity, he would con-"sent to my going there; but he has the "cruelty to urge, that, because my mind "can be amused by gaiety and conversa-"tion, application, (its destruction) would "be its best cure; and that, if I cannot "walk, neither could I dance at those "balls, which he foolishly supposes would "be my great attraction to that spot: "but I believe no woman has suffered in "silence so intensely, and with so little "pity as I have.

"Lord Torrendale himself has been ill; "and poor little Floss, whom you remem-

"ber, has had two attacks of his old com-
"plaint. I must give you the symptoms:
"the first time I believe he caught cold, by
"running out too hastily to see a friend,
"just after he had been washed; he
"coughed twice during the night, but
"towards morning had a sound sleep, and
"seemed better: the next time he was
"more seriously ill; he alternately barked
"and coughed during the whole night, with
"several symptoms of high fever; which
"altogether made me so nervous, that I
"have had another attack, worse than the
"first, accompanied with sinkings, tears,
"hysterical terrors, and the most dread-
"ful palpitations of the heart. But a truce
"with this unpleasant topic; you know
"how I detest complaining.

"Buxton is very full, and we have some
"really fashionable people; they wear
"the dresses still tighter than ever in
"the morning, and in the evening it is
"quite indecent to have any clothes on;
"trains are shortening considerably, but
"a drapery may relieve the scantiness of

"the general effect. I give these hints to "you, Matilda, because from recent cir- "cumstances you might be less attentive "to the changes in fashion.

"The balls answer very well. Old Lady "Kilcare, 'of the hundred petticoats,' "(to apply the phraseology of Strathallan's "favourite poet) looking as frightfully, "dancing as furiously, and making as "great a noise with her heels, as ever.

"Arbella (mind I don't reckon her "among the fashionables) is here; her "present favourite, a major O'Hara, a "handsome, dashing Irishman, pleasant, "easy, insinuating, like most of his coun- "trymen; but sometimes, I think, deficient "in the first polish of good breeding; and "most shamefully erroneous in his taste "as to female beauty: she bores me to "death to *chaperon* her to some fine "places; where Mrs. Stockwell, (poor "silly soul! though she durst not shew her "face), is ambitious her niece should ap- "pear. I am unwilling to seem an accom- "plice; yet I really believe I would go

"with her to Lord Sommerton's break-
"fast, if I had a dress to my mind.

"By the by, Matilda, you promised to "paint me a trimming like one of yours, "which I admired prodigiously; if you "could do it for me this *fête*, and send it "down immediately, I should be greatly "obliged to you; I cannot remember the "pattern, or any thing about it, but that "it *was* a trimming; but I dare say you "will find it out—somehow.

"Your letter contained several ques-"tions which I would gladly answer, but "I am nearly arrived at the end of my "paper. Your present situation, and the "attention required by Mrs. Melbourne, "(to whom Lord Torrendale and I desire "to be remembered) will, I doubt not, "prevent your being able to bestow so "much of your time upon your friends "as you formerly did. Should you, how-"ever, upon our return to town, be able "to spare half an hour to Fitzroy-square, "I shall always be happy to assure my

"dear Miss Melbourne personally, how
"much I am, with the sincerest regard,
"Her most faithful friend,
and humble servant,
"LAURA TORRENDALE."

"P. S. I now recollect what the trimming was. It had peacock's feathers and roses in it; and I should be obliged to you, in copying it for me, to put a few more touches of gold upon the spot at the tip of the peacock's feather; and to make the green *un peu plus prononcé.*"

"Here are the letters of the fine lady and her butt," said Mrs. Melbourne, as she returned them to Matilda. "Consider at least, my love," she continued, answering the silent tear, that involuntarily started to her daughter's eye, "the same change of circumstances, that has shewn us the hollowness of one friend, has developed in another these excellent

qualities which, in the hour of prosperity, some trifling foibles obscured."

The tears that she observed, had a deeper source, than this tender, watchful parent imagined. Reason can console the heart for those, that disappointed friendship bids it shed; but love alone can dry the tear, that love has commanded to flow.

On the first perusal of the letter, when the name of Strathallan had struck Matilda's eye, she had eagerly passed on to what followed, in hopes at least to receive some proof of interest and remembrance; to hear from himself of *his* health and welfare, for whose sake she had sacrificed her own. How great her disappointment then, to find that name mentioned only in association with a ludicrous and flippant parody! Through the day she endeavoured to reason herself into composure, but in vain. Every re-perusal increased her dissatisfaction. "I desired him to forget me," she said, "but I did not think he could do it so soon and so completely. I judged of him by myself, and erred, in

making him an exception to all his sex, when I supposed him possessed of sensibility equal to my own: yet, was this the moment, Strathallan, to shew the self-command, with which you could banish *her* from your thoughts, who, you once declared, formed their most delightful occupation? Would one little word, one expression of kindness bestowed on me, have been too much? Should you, too, be found among the proud, the selfish, and the unfeeling? Should you, too, join to press down to the earth, a creature already bowed with calamity, by the additional weight of scorned, insulted love? But am I not unjust?—Surrounded by pleasure and prosperity, how can you spare a thought to Matilda? The world and fortune love you even as I do; and I, who behold them under their unkindest aspect, would trouble your enjoyment, by clinging to your felicity; but in vain—fear me not—for I am miserable, and misery cannot approach you. It is changed, at your presence, into joy. Joy, calm, pure, de-

lightful, joy, such as I once have known, surrounds you, speaks in each gentle glance, and overflows from that blest countenance, all graciousness and love. How many, adorned with every advantage that beauty, wealth, and rank, can give, are at this moment disputing the empire of that heart. But it is vowed away, and may its choice be happy!"

Her tears flowed as she spoke, in involuntary and bitter regret; the more bitter, because involuntary. She had hardly wiped them away when she was startled by the unexpected entrance of Sir Harold Melbourne. "Has any thing disturbed you? You seem ill, my lovely cousin," he said. Matilda, recovering herself, in some confusion replied, that she was perfectly well. "Forgive me then," he said, "and attribute it to my anxious tenderness, if the least change in your appearance excites my alarm." Then gazing on her with an earnestness, at which her modest eyes were cast upon the ground, "How

lovely is virtue," he cried, "when thus enshrined in beauty's mould! Oh, my fair cousin! was it nature, was it passion, that drew my heart towards you, the first moment I beheld you, with a sweet but imperious force?—I regretted the past, I lived but in the present.—I will not say I experienced happiness,—that is extinguished in my bosom; but at that mild, yet radiant aspect, my joyless deserted heart was awakened to the remembrance of the existence of such a sentiment. It started once more to the recollection of what constituted its charm. Can I do less than make an offering to you of those feelings, which you alone could revive? Oh, love, I thought I had known thy power!—beauty I had seen before—but never till now did beauty arrayed in its most resistless force, in all its gentle, innocent, yet awful, pride, thus come upon my unprepared heart, commanding it in that voice which the world obeys, to yield up its every wish to her direction, its

peace to her control; its very existence to a word.—Will you speak that word, fair cousin?"

Matilda looked up. She was assailed by professions of passion, of devotion the most ardent—professions to which perhaps the romantic wildness of the language in which they were conveyed, added a persuasive charm, at the moment that her feelings, outraged where they had loved and trusted most sincerely,—felt at once the ties of friendship broken, and every tenderer recollection converted to bitterness and regret. She opposed the disinterested, generous love of Sir Harold, to the coldness, the silence, of the proud Strathallan. She paused a moment—but did she hesitate? No; love, that refuses to allow any merit to her decision, dictated that constancy, which in vain aspired to be called a sacrifice, since she must be inconstant to herself, ere she could admit the idea of existing for another than Strathallan. Yet that passion, which was deaf alike to the voice of in-

terest or resentment, must have yielded to that of duty, if the fatal objection which every word and action seemed now to confirm, had not determined her reply.

With a tenderness which she alone possessed, to soften refusal, yet at the same time extinguish hope, she professed the gratitude she should ever retain for the proofs she had received of her cousin's friendship; while she declared, that her heart had been too recently and repeatedly attacked by sorrow, to allow her to repay it with that warm affection which preference so flattering deserved.

"I hardly hope it, my lovely cousin; merit like yours can be won only by the noblest heart, not by one lost, like mine;—yet where could you find one, that would more earnestly endeavour to repay the sacrifice you made? Do you ask love? Behold me at your bidding, the creature of your will.—Would you be worshipped as some fair being, above this

wretched scene? See me devoted, ready to sacrifice at your shrine!"

Alarmed by an increasing wildness and earnestness of manner, which justified her most distressing apprehensions, Matilda continued only more firm in her denial. "I see the truth!" cried Sir Harold, his countenance suddenly changing from an expression of touching dejection, to the most furious violence, "it is love, not grief, that keeps you from me."—"Oh no, no, believe it not," exclaimed Matilda, while a fear too horrible to acknowledge, thrilled her breast with insupportable anxiety, "there is not a being on earth whom I prefer—there is not a being in whom the interest I take—believe me, I conjure you," she continued, interrupting herself, and scarce knowing what she said from the excess of her alarm.

"I am satisfied," he replied, with resumed calmness, "and after the assertion you have made, there is one slight favour, which I am sure you will not refuse me." Sir Harold was drest for court; he had his

sword on, and he now put his hand to it. Terrified by this action, Matilda hastily ran towards the door; he bade her not be uneasy, for he had locked it. She then attempted to reach the bell; but her cousin placed himself between her and it, and completely drawing his sword, told her she was safe only on condition that she did not cry out, and placing a chair for her, he begged, and at length forced her to be seated. Then with one hand waving the sword over her head, with the other he took hers, and intreated her to hear him.

"Oh spare my life!" cried Matilda, kneeling to him. "Compose yourself, my pretty cousin," he said, raising her, "why should you imagine I desired to harm you?" Then having reseated her, and observing the terror expressed in her eyes, "What is the matter with you," he continued, "can you not sit quiet? Did you never sit with a sword over your head before?"—"Kill me at once," she exclaimed, "but keep me no longer in this

distracting state." "Do not be afraid, what harm can a sword do you at this distance? I intend you no harm—at least not if I know myself," he added, putting his hand to his head. "There—with your weakness—your woman's fears, you had nearly made me forget the purpose of all I had done;—it was only to make you swear upon this sword, that since my suit was rejected, you would never admit that of any other."

Even in this moment of agitation and alarm, Matilda felt the consequences of an engagement so rashly taken, and with a firmness and fortitude little to be expected at her age, and still less in her present situation, she refused to comply; and endeavoured, by every argument she could devise, to make her unfortunate cousin alter his resolution. "Take your choice!" he said, alternately presenting the sword before her eyes, and raising it above her head; "we are alone. No mortal can hinder me from putting an end to your life. If you call out for help

you are lost. Swear or die!" At length Matilda, bursting into tears, knelt before the sword, and took the oath required.

"You are now free," said Sir Harold, "but remember," he continued, turning with added solemnity to his trembling victim, who had sunk, almost inanimate, to the ground, "if you fail in your engagement, not yours, but the life-blood that is dearer to your heart, shall flow to revenge the perfidy."

Matilda opened her eyes, while a convulsive shudder alone showed, that though scarcely conscious of the words he had uttered, she felt they were of dreadful import. Sir Harold ran to the window, threw up the sash, and flinging open the door, in order to give more air to his fainting cousin, left her to recover, if possible, from the effects of this truly dreadful interview, and quitted the house, resolving no longer to delay his intended return to the Rocks.

CHAP. VII.

Envy will merit, like its shade, pursue;
And, like the shadow, proves the substance true.
POPE.

"When from Southampton's or from Brighton's shore,
Which charmed when London's revelry was o'er,
The fading beauty of autumnal hours,
Recalls the sportsman to his native bowers."

LADY Torrendale, who perceived she must reconcile herself to the thoughts of spending another Christmas in the country, found the constraint rendered more tolerable by the return of her London friends, who flocked around her with a vast importation of fresh fashions, fresh compliments, fresh news, and fresh scandal, particularly about the recent events, that had happened in the family of the Melbournes.

Had Matilda been concealed behind a curtain, and enabled to listen to all that

passed, she would not perhaps have been much flattered by the various opinions expressed of her, among the circle of which she had been so late the happy idol. But sentiments were changed at the residence, and it was no longer necessary to conceal the offence which her unequalled, though unassuming merit, had given.

Lady Lyndhurst, who hated her superiority, because she herself made pretensions to talent; her daughter, Miss de Courcy, who hated her, because too indolent to aspire to similar distinctions; Miss Langrish, who envied Matilda for the attention excited by her beauty; and Miss Hautenville, who envied her for exciting attention at all, now spoke their sentiments, unrestrained by the fear of giving pain to the mistress of the house, or of incurring the reproach of singularity. The conversation happening to take place shortly after the re-appearance of Sir Harold Melbourne at the Rocks, "I think," Alcæus the poet began, "that we shall not be much benefited by our new

neighbour. He is the most singular being; sometimes he is seen sitting for whole hours at the top of a rock, solitary and fantastic as an ape; sometimes bounding from cliff to cliff, with the agility of a monkey; or passing the day in some thick wood, without taking any refreshment, but for the attention of his servants, who know his haunts, and where to follow him on those occasions. So that on the whole, if we have lost old Sidrophel, he has at least provided a worthy successor."

"All the Melbournes are oddities," said Lady Lyndhurst. "I have heard that after all Mr. Melbourne died in great difficulties, and left his family in distress."

"Poor man! what a pity! I always said it would come to that!" was echoed around the room, though why it was to "come to that," but for the unfortunate accident which overwhelmed a part of Mr. Melbourne's fortune, no mortal could divine. While some made a faint attempt to commiserate their former friends, for the reverses they had experienced, others

calling philosophy to their aid, concluded that it was useless to deplore what was inevitable: but, however divided opinions were, on the subject of their other misfortunes, it was universally agreed, that after all Mr. Melbourne had endured, his death was rather to be considered "as a release;" that easy word, by which the world endeavours to disguise the more than cold indifference, the impatience, too often inspired by long protracted suffering; ignorant or unheedful of the nature of true affection, which clings fondly to the wreck, however faded and decayed, of what it long has loved; and dreads nothing so much as the cessation of those mournful duties, at once its pleasure and its pain.

Lady Lyndhurst, who thought it proper to affect a degree of sensibility, asked the Countess, with an appearance of becoming interest, if she had lately heard of Miss Melbourne: "I am quite in pain about her," she said; "brought up with such different expectations, what do you

think is now to become of her; is she to marry her cousin?"

"Positively I make it a rule to think of it as little as possible," replied Lady Torrendale. "Dwelling upon unpleasant subjects affects one's self disagreeably, and can do one's friends no possible good."

"I subscribe to that," cried Alcæus, as her ladyship uttered this praiseworthy maxim, with that self-approving nod with which she generally laid down the law. "Besides that, really to call one's friends to mind, after they have suffered some little change in their situation, requires something of Mr. Professor Feinagle's assistance."

"Miss Melbourne had better have played her cards with a little more attention, when she was in fashion," observed Miss Hautenville, "for she will not find it now so easy to secure an establishment."

"Oh!" said Arbella Ferrars giddily, "young ladies of twenty have always

time enough to think of whom they will have; it is only young ladies of thirty, who need begin to think who will have them."

Miss Hautenville made no reply—but she treasured this remark among the various misdemeanors of the imprudent Arbella, for which she hoped at some future period, a full and perfect revenge.

"I have it," cried Alcæus; "she will now marry old Sowerby, and glad enough to get him. How very attentive he used to be, teaching her all sort of things, and catching her butterflies"——

"Mr. Sowerby catching butterflies!" The laugh that was led by Lady Torrendale, was echoed by the whole company.

"I don't mean running after them," resumed the poet a little disconcerted, "but he had a way of catching them, sitting quite still in his study, by alluring them to some viscous matter, and preserving them, and——I can't explain it better, may I be shot; but I have seen whole folios of preserved butterflies, and dried sea-weeds, that he collected for

her when he was at Swansea—and I am sure now they will make a match of it."

"Impossible! You do not think Miss Melbourne would so little consult her heart, though you pretend to do so, Mr. Spring," said his fair enemy, Sappho.

"Upon my honour I do; I think she is . . . . . ." said Miss Langrish, looking in Lady Torrendale's eyes to discover, before she ventured to proceed, what she was; but as the expression of that lady's countenance was very dubious, she thought it most prudent to drop the sentence unfinished.

"Depend upon it," said Helen de Courcy, "he will not marry her; those very clever women are the gentlemen's aversion."

"True, Miss de Courcy," observed Sappho mournfully, "men of sense discourage and despise them; while others hate and fear them. The reputation of genius carries such a disadvantage along with it, that one would almost imagine it had some supernatural power of depriving

the woman of all personal attractions who possessed it."

"I wish for my part," said Alcæus, looking maliciously at Sappho, "that because the prejudice is supposed to run, that every woman of genius is ugly, every ugly woman would not, by an inverted rule, fancy herself a woman of genius."

"You must surely mistake," cried Lady Lyndhurst, "no woman ever became less charming by the cultivation of her mental powers; it is to Miss Melbourne's extreme giddiness, affectation, and coquetry, that we are to look for her failure; not to her pretensions to ability or knowledge."

"Pretensions your ladyship justly denominates them," replied Miss Hautenville, grinning a ghastly smile, "for as to their solidity, it was very dubious. She boasted much of her father's instructions; but what could *she* possess of knowledge in natural philosophy, for instance, who had never read the Loves of the Plants? and was ignorant even of Buffon, except such passages as papa selected?"

"Oh, there you do her injustice, I doubt not," resumed the wit Alcæus: "trust me, Miss Hautenville, your young friend was better acquainted with the French philosopher, than either her papa, or her still dearer tutor, supposed. A forbidden study is always the sweetest; and the Italian inscription for the violet, *Nascosta ma dolce*, might, I doubt not, have been chosen very appropriately by Miss Melbourne, for her '*devise*.'"

Arbella, indignant, was again going to speak, when the entrance of Lord Strathallan and Major O'Hara diverted the attention from her. The gay, the handsome, Major O'Hara, though now her professed admirer, could hardly obtain a word or a look from her, while, eager in the cause of friendship, she was only vexed at the interruption occasioned by his presence. Not so the rest of the ladies, who anxiously applied to him, as the umpire to decide their dispute. "Oh, major, you are just come in time," said Lady Torrendale, "we have been dis-

cussing Miss Melbourne's fortune—have you any *sortes Virgilianæ* to determine it? With us nothing has yet come up but Mr. Sowerby."

"For Matilda Melbourne! Oh, by all that's beautiful, that is a little too bad. I certainly cannot pretend to be better informed than Lady Torrendale, but I will tell you what, when I was last in town, was generally believed." The major then began with the air of one who was accustomed to an admiring auditory; "The story, that generally prevailed in the world, that is to say, in a certain circle, was, that her cousin Melbourne had fallen suddenly and passionately in love with her, and the way of it was this: Old Melbourne had some debts, which his heir, Sir Harold, who is a very good fellow, was in a much greater hurry to claim; than his widow was to pay. So she arranged it that he should have an interview with her daughter instead of herself.

"Miss Melbourne met him, still in mourning for her father, and looking most

interestingly beautiful. She was at first all tears, timidity, and sensibility; he all attention, politeness, and compliance. In short, he was by far too much *épris* to think of demanding his debt; and, contrary to the usual course, they were given to each other by mutual engagement; even before the world, so apt to be liberal in those cases, had thought on whom to bestow them: a promise passed between them, which only waits to be ratified when Sir Harold returns from the Rocks, where he is at present to adjust some final arrangements. The equipages are rdered—the dresses ready for inspection, at Madame R——'s—and Mrs. Melbourne is complimented by all her acquaintance as she ought to be, for a devilish clever woman."

Lady Torrendale gave Strathallan a look which seemed to say, "There—I said it was so!"

"And pray, major," said his lordship, turning to O'Hara, "what is your authority for that report!"

"My authority! Oh, faith, my lord, you must ask half the world for that; I only repeat what others say; and yet I believe I am pretty correct too; and by Jove, I don't see how she could do better. It is plain he thought of her from the first, by his complimenting the family in purchasing all the collections. For what use upon earth could they be to him? It was a great loss to the public though: the sale would have been such an excellent lounge. I was told I should see more curiosities than ever were collected together, since Sir Ashton Lever's museum was sold."

"Or Nicholas Gimcrack's," said Alcæus.

"I never was at that," replied the major, "but I really did think of the disappointment of Lord N——, or the Marquis of D——, and some of those gentlemen with the bibliomania, when I heard of the books and manuscripts. Such a feast of black letter, and illuminated scrolls as they would have had:

the loss was less to me, who never admire any page so much as that which a pair of lovely eyes illumines," bowing politely to the ladies. While the major paused to receive that applause, which his eloquence, or his fine teeth, could always command, and Miss Langrish whispered "what a complete ladies' man he was," Alcæus, who thought this a good opportunity for what he called a little quiz upon Lord Strathallan, resumed, "No, no, trust me, major, you are all in the wrong; quite out, my dear fellow; you may depend upon it, Miss Melbourne will marry no Sir Harold. She will bring forward those bright talents, that astonished us all, upon the stage. 'Tis the only way now, and my life for it," glancing maliciously at Strathallan, "a coronet will, in less than a season, replace her pasteboard crown."

"Excuse me, Mr. Spring," said Miss Hautenville, "universal as were Miss Melbourne's talents, it is not likely she

could have learnt much of the business of the stage at the Rocks, with old Prospero, who lived there like a wizard in his cave."

"If you style Mr. Melbourne Prospero," observed Sappho, "you must at least allow the sweet, innocent, Matilda to have been his Miranda."

"And we need not look far for a Ferdinand," continued Alcæus, again glancing at Lord Strathallan.

"And if ever there was a Caliban," cried the major, "it was that Sow—Sow—Sow—"

"Sowerby," said Miss Langrish.

"Well, Sowerby might perhaps be the name. He encouraged old Melbourne in all his singularities, and taught him to make such an anchorite of himself. Why, think of his having three companies of our fellows quartered within a mile of him for a summer, and never inviting one of them within his doors—and where would have been the great favour, pray, if he had given them a dinner once a month,

once a week, ay, or every day in the week? Who'd have thanked him if he had?" continued O'Hara triumphantly, "I say, who the devil would have thanked him?"

"If no one would have thanked him—" interrupted Alcæus, with a pertness perhaps more allowable than usual, "I think Mr. Melbourne was not so much to blame, in keeping his good dinners to himself."

"I had once the honour of a *rencontre* with that Squire Sowerby," resumed the major, turning from the poet with the most sovereign contempt; "and though it originated in a mistake, I think he might have conducted himself with more respect. I understood that when Mr. Melbourne was out, one might see the collections and walk over the house. So one day as I was on horseback, reconnoitring the country a little—happening to pop upon it rather suddenly—purely *par hazard* I give you my honour; I thought I'd just ask the question, and I called out to this Sowerby, or whatever

his name is, whom I mistook for one of Melbourne's people, to know if I could get admittance; he made me no answer at first, till I, (recollecting he might possibly be the old fellow who helped Mr. Melbourne to stuff his birds and preserve plants and shells,) asked him more civilly if he would be my Cicerone. He looked at me for a minute, as if he wondered how I had contrived to get within sight of the mansion, and then, putting on a more forbidding countenance than he had got already, he said, I must be misinformed, for the curiosities were never to be seen; and at any rate, the ladies of the family were, at that very moment, drinking tea in one of those apartments."

"Well, major, and what did you answer to that very civil repulse, after your very accidental wandering through the *only pass* to the Rocks?" interrupted Alcæus maliciously.

"I answered," replied O'Hara, addressing himself to the countess, "that it was never my intention, nor was it often

my misfortune to displease ladies; but as to himself, whom I presumed by his appearance to be some domestic of the family, (I knew by this time who the cunning old fox was perfectly,) I begged to know by what right he kept sole guard over fine women, as he would over a preserved pheasantry. He said, still more sulkily, that he was no servant, but a friend of the family, and muttered something about taking offence without cause. I said, he had his redress—that if any thing I had said gave him offence, I was easily to be found; my card was at his service; my name was major O'Hara—and I was ready, at any time he should call upon me, to give him whatever satisfaction he might require. Rode off; and never heard more of Mr. Squire Sowerby from that time to this."

"Oh, he was afraid for Matilda," said Alcæus, "he kept watch over her like a dragon. I heard he used to make her study astronomy with him night after night, like the lady Pekuah. But it

didn't do. Did he think she was to stay with him for ever, counting the satellites of Jupiter, or watching for the star Benemasch, in the tail of the great bear? He was educating her," continued the poet, "as a little learned wife for himself. She knew the whole theory of comets, from Aristotle to Tycho Brahe—and before she left this could as well describe one of their transits———"

"And when she left this, it was a transit of Venus by Jove!" interrupted O'Hara.

The poet cast on him a look of scornful reproach. Miss De Courcy bit her lip: "Miss Melbourne was certainly pretty," said she, "it was a pity she was so very affected"—"Yet so ignorant," cried Miss Hautenville. "And so confident," added Miss Langrish. "Oh no, deucedly awkward and bashful," said Alcæus.

"Really now, you have been all too hard upon the poor young thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Stockwell, rolling her eyes, and drawling in her whining tone of affected commiseration. "Though she is not,

to be sure, of the consequence she have been—and though she has not as many advantages as you, Arbella, for instance, (don't look so cross at the major, you know he's a field-officer, love) yet still she is a gentlewoman—and birth is every thing as I say—I am sure my grandfeather the general—" "I thought he was an archbishop," interrupted Alcæus. "So he was!" resumed Mrs. Stockwell, thankfully accepting the correction, "he was an archbishop."

"My dear Mrs. Stockwell," cried Sappho, (who thought her good nature deserved that she should help her out of this difficulty,) "I agree with you perfectly in the opinion you have expressed of Miss Melbourne, and hope no idle sarcasms will ever be suffered to reach her ear, and disturb her recovered tranquillity; if they should, she must only remember that

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,"

and that showers as well as suns are

necessary to bring the charms of the rose to perfection, and to expand to full beauty its loveliness and bloom."

"Miss Swanley," replied Mrs. Stockwell, "do you know, the whole time you was a talking I have been admiring of the pattern down the front of your gown; 'tis so sweetly pretty? Is it a lace pattern, pray mem?—Did you get it at the shop, or did you do it yourself?"

Sappho, who, when she paused, with perhaps a little allowable vanity, at the conclusion of her well-rounded period, had flattered herself with having made a convert of Mrs. Stockwell, and roused the latent spark of benevolence and good nature she had discovered, into a flame; turned from these multiplied interrogatories with a degree of impatience, which was not lessened by the remarks of Miss Mountain, who, taking up her observation, and quibbling as she was wont, in imitation of her favourite Arcadian knight, exclaimed "Sweets to the sweet—Miss Melbourne's sweetness might well entitle her to the

parallel, so ably instituted by Miss Swanley, between her and the rose; yet much I fear she is not unsurrounded by thorns; and that those sweets would be soured, if the union with her sour tutor Mr. Sowerby, which some of the company seem to expect, took place. For that reason, I rather hope that Sir Harold, her kinsman, as more congenial in years and disposition, may transplant that sweet rose into his garden,

" For earthly happier is the rose distilled
" Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
" Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness."

Are you not of my opinion, Lord Strathallan?" she continued, turning to him, with her accustomed low bend and gracious smile.

" Well now, I think, say what you will, Miss Melbourne is a very nice lady," said a voice, issuing from a distant part of the room, which was soon recognized to be Mr. George Spring's. " And though she knew the stars and the books, and was

well read and accomplished, and could tell about the plants, and the knuckles of comets—"

"Nuclei, *Sirrr!*" cried Alcæus, with an emphasis upon the last letter that seemed to say, "Will the earth never open to receive this Goth, that pretends to call itself my brother? —"

"Well, though she knew about the Nuclei, and was a fine lady, and a clever lady, and above all things cried up for her beauty, she never was saucy and impertinent as some misses are. I am sure I have cause to say so, for she was always very obliging and kind unto me.—"

"Very kind to you, that's good, faith," cried the major—"that's very good—stick to that, George—Miss Melbourne was very kind to you, and no doubt you are very grateful in return. Gad! that's the best thing I ever heard in my life."

Arbella, who had been in vain waiting for the end of a conversation, in which she who had been so lately "the most charming, the most fascinating" girl in

the world, was thus wantonly loaded on all sides with the imputation of almost every fault and folly—at length exclaimed, "I own I have listened with surprise to charges, so various and contradictory, preferred against one whose only crime was the possession of perfections, employed so pleasingly, borne so meekly. Her virtues, distinguished as her talents, artless as her beauty, were, I thought, beyond the reach of malice itself to attack.—I, for my own part, have contemplated her character with a delight, beyond what any success of my own could have excited—a feeling as distant from envy as from emulation—one which convinced me of the reality of that friendship in a female breast, whose existence" (looking disdainfully around her) "I might otherwise for ever have doubted."

"My dearest Miss Ferrars," cried Strathallan, snatching her hand in a transport of which he instantly repented, "how I adore you for that sentiment!" Then, relinquishing it in some confusion, he

added, "how pleasing it is to find one whose feelings are so much in unison with our own!"

"On that subject, my lord, I trust we shall never disagree," Arbella replied; "it is not for those who have seen her, to be reminded of her various charms and talents."

"No indeed, she was a charming creature, if I may say so," cried George Spring. "Don't you remember, my lord, when she sung or repeated any thing, she had such a look with her eyes—stay now, I'm bad at expression, but I know what I mean myself."

"You mean," interrupted his brother Alcæus,

"Her eyes' blue languish, and her auburn hair—"

that was what charmed you, George, hey?" It was always poor George's fate to be told what his meaning was. He on this occasion, however, sturdily maintained his opinion against his brother, who continued to reply to his praises of Miss

Melbourne's various accomplishments, "Nonsense, nonsense—cursed affectation—abominable squalling—You're wrong there, George—Depend upon it you're wrong.—"

"However Mr. Spring may mistake in particular instances," observed Arbella, "no one will, I fancy, feel inclined to deny the truth of his assertion in general, that art and affectation were, by Miss Melbourne, equally unknown and unrequired; and that in whatever way she exercised her talents, whether she read, sung, or recited, she followed nature, passion, and feeling, as her only guides."

Arbella's beauty depending less upon regularity of features than upon the soul that informed them, and which imparted animation and variety to her every action, always appeared to the greatest advantage when any circumstance called forth the innate spirit and generosity she possessed in such a high degree; but the graceful earnestness of her manner, the beautiful openness of her counte-

nance, were disregarded, while it was only remarked that she had expressed herself with a warmth unusual in very young women.

Lord Torrendale coldly observed that the less young ladies had to do with "nature, passion, and feeling," the better. The major, as he leant over the chair of the half-encircled Helena, whispered—"feelings in unison—poetry and passion—very pretty indeed!" and both continued laughing and sneering at they knew not what, while Miss Hautenville, who perceived that Miss Ferrars, as was often the case, had, from an advantageous beginning, got upon dangerous ground, made no remark, but "hushed in grim repose," awaited the issue of the conversation.

"Am I wrong," exclaimed Arbella, looking around her, "in making use of terms which express only a laudable sensibility, a feeling of all that is good and great? If we are forbidden all the finer energies, all the stronger emotions of the soul, where is the field for the exertions

of genius, the triumphs of beauty?—For what does Shakespear write, but to excite an exalted pleasure through his magic power over the passions? to what does he address himself? is not nature his archetype—feeling his tribunal?"

"I agree with you perfectly, my dear Miss Ferrars," said Major O'Hara, "wherever pleasure is, as you justly observe, there can be no harm imaginable."

"No, not exactly that," said Arbella, who now begun to grow confused in her turn; "you mistake me. I fear I am not perfectly understood," she continued, looking from her favourite resource, the table, to the company for assistance, but in vain; many had not attended to what was said, but hearing the words "passion, beauty, emotion of the soul," uttered by the dashing Miss Ferrars, concluded there was something wrong. Two very good ladies, Mrs. Sagely and Mrs. Rueful, who did not understand one word of what had passed, but who would not have "committed" themselves in such a manner for

the world, looked at each other in silence, and shook their heads most ominously—the major laughed—the fair Helen tittered—while the satanic sneer diffused over Miss Hautenville's features, evinced her satisfaction was complete.

Unable to endure their triumph, Arbella took little Sappho under her arm, who, for her defence of Matilda, was suddenly become her friend, and rising hastily, walked with her into an adjoining room, where a sober party were assembled at whist. The perturbation excited by the late circumstances still remained in Arbella's features, and Sappho, who had been told that in complexion and features she resembled the best descriptions of her illustrious namesake, adopted a good deal of the costume she is usually represented to have worn, in order to favour the illusion—so that she was altogether a most extraordinary figure—we will not say that the appearance of these two luminaries united, absolutely blinded the party assembled, as owls

blink at the sun; but certain it is that their entrance did excite a degree of emotion, in which Mrs. Goodbody forgot to win a trick she might have secured, and for which, being severely reprimanded by her partner Doctor Doldrum, she cried out, "I beg your pardon, but I was really startled,—surely there is Arbella the wit, and Sappho the poet together."

"So much the worse, so much the worse," growled the doctor, "the world was never the better since women forsook their tent-stitch to turn wits and poets."

"But what's the meaning of that petticoat she has got upon her head," said Mrs. Lackwit, turning round to look at Sappho.

"Oh, Ma'am, you know she is a genius," yawned Mr. Drowsy, "geniuses never wear their clothes like any body else."

"Well, I thank my stars, I am no genius!" resumed Mrs. Lackwit, raising her eyes to heaven in pious gratitude.

"Nor I," cried Mrs. Goodbody—"nor you, my good Doctor," nodding sympathetically to Doctor Doldrum, "you are no genius neither; so let them walk about and amuse themselves, while we count how many we have by honours."

CHAP. VIII.

Tu que la dulce vida en tiernos años
Trocaste per la vida trabajosa
La blanca seda, y purpura preciosa
Por aspro silicio y toscos paños
Canta la gloria immensa que se encierra
En el alma dichosa ya prendada
Del amor que se enciende en puro zelo.
Que se el piloto al divisar la tierra
Alza la voz de gozo acompañada
Que deve hazer quien ya descubre el cielo?

JUAN DE TARSIS.

A SEVERE illness, the consequence of the dreadful scene she had recently gone through, left Matilda in a state of weakness and depression, which rendered her recovery at once slow and doubtful. The idea of the obligation imposed by her vow, even if one, taken under such circumstances, could be supposed binding, was not what could materially affect her spirits. Was not Strathallan already dead

to her? He was—and in that reflection, at once her consolation and despair, the loss of all that in this world she valued seemed included.

But though his fate was no longer connected with hers, this did not prevent the idea of his possible danger, from darkening her imagination with vain, yet insupportable terrors. She reasoned, she struggled against this impression. She set before herself the absurdity, the improbability of the supposition, that a tenderness, known to so few, scarcely acknowledged but to be checked, should reach the ears and excite the vengeance of an offended lover.

That impaired state of health, which prevented the admission of pleasurable impressions, rendered her susceptibility to distressing images only more painfully acute. The recollection of the sad, solemn, interview with Lord Torrendale, in which the afflicted parent pronounced her alone worthy to be the bride of his lost Strathallan, recurred to her imagina-

tion, and roused that latent spark of romantic superstition, which solitude, and her singular education, had contributed to foster in her mind. "It was in death alone he would have united us," she said; "and am I at length to bring round thy destruction, to be the cause of evil to thee, who hast been to me, till now, the source of happiness? Is my fatal love to be thy bane? Must I, who would die to ensure thy safety, be the worthless cause that shall endanger it?" These feelings she was obliged, however, carefully to conceal; for Mrs. Melbourne, who had indulgence for every other form of suffering, mental or corporeal, was deaf alone to the forebodings of fancy.

This restraint, which Matilda felt at the time as painful, was in fact of use to her; and by not speaking of her apprehensions at all, she learnt to think of them less. But this forced tranquillity was in nothing allied to happiness. She neglected no duty, she omitted no employment; but occupation and amusement were alike

vapid, tasteless, and uninteresting: every pursuit, in which she was engaged, was rendered unpleasing, by an overpowering languor, that seemed to promise, but that never brought repose. Dread, deep, and silent, it had all the gloom and stillness without the advantages of rest.

Deprived alike of health, of appetite, and gaiety—she arose, but it was not to hope; she read, but not for improvement; she lay down, but not to sleep. Of all the pleasures she had formerly tasted, one only was still a solace to her mind: it was, when, alone and undisturbed, she dedicated to harmony that solemn twilight hour, in which her ear had once drunk with such deep delight sounds unexpected and thrilling—sounds attuned by love and Strathallan. Then recalling his air, his voice, his look; figuring to herself the very spot on which he stood—at that moment she felt, indeed, a transient respite from her sorrows.

While thus nourishing a melancholy, which, because unacknowledged, she

thought innocent, an accidental conversation with the interesting recluse, whose company, since her illness, was become more and more dear to Matilda, induced her to look with more care into the movements of her own heart, and to dread the encroachments of a selfish indulgence, which might, if not checked in time, swallow up all her better feelings.

Though considerably Matilda's senior, the slenderness of her form, the delicacy of her features, on which no trace of emotion seemed to have ever rested, and a certain peculiar and beautiful transparency of skin, through which the liquid current of her "pure and eloquent blood" was seen in each slightest variation, continued to the countenance of Clara some of the graces of youth. Moving with the freedom from care, and almost the lightness, of a disembodied spirit, no anxiety appeared to have power to reach her, no accident to ruffle the undisturbed serenity she enjoyed. "How I envy you!" said Matilda, pressing the hand of the gentle

nun, while an involuntary tear sprung into her eye, "Still an inhabitant of this world, you seem already disengaged from its pains and pleasures. Here you have already a taste of that hereafter, the happiness of which we are told is to consist in an eternity of rest. Oh! what would I not give to have attained to your blissful state!"

Clara smiled, and turning on her those dove-like eyes that ever beamed with a chastened and saint-like light, "I have often observed," she said, "that you, who still set a value upon what this world has to give, never seem to view with such envy, even those, who are in the fullest possession of all its advantages, as those who completely and contentedly resign them. I own it has always struck me, as a strong argument against the satisfaction they are supposed to afford." "There is but one my heart refuses to resign," Matilda resumed, "but I am ashamed to intrude upon the sainted calm of a soul like yours, with sorrows to which

you must have ever been a stranger."

"What!" exclaimed the nun, with momentary emotion, "do you believe my mind is content from insensibility,—that I attained to my present state without a sigh, without a struggle? No, I rather thank that merciful power, that never chastens but to correct and bless, for teaching me to turn the feelings that consumed me, into the channel in which alone they could be productive of lasting joys. He gave me time to repent of the dreadful blindness in which I had wandered, and to atone for the past, by devoting the rest of my life to his service."

These expressions excited Matilda's curiosity in a more vehement degree than she ever had experienced it before, and though internally convinced, the fair nun could never have been guilty of any error, for which, in a worldly sense, she had cause to reproach herself, yet still the idea of a picture of sorrows and conflicts, perhaps like her own, was soothing to her mind; and she intreated Clara, if

the recollection of the past were not too painful, to explain to her, some of the circumstances, to which she alluded.

Clara looked fixedly at her. "I will comply," she said, "the more readily, because I see it is not an idle, inquisitive, spirit that dictated your request; and my simple history contains a lesson that may be useful, my sweet girl, even to you. I am glad we have an hour alone, for your mother has a manner, which, though it invites confidence, yet chills enthusiasm; and enthusiasm was the master-spring of my destiny.

"You have heard of my having been sent to a convent in France for education. There, thrown among a number of young people who were of a different country, and put under the superintendance of strangers, the gratitude I felt to my superiors for their care, did not prevent the friends, from whom I had been separated, from being the first object on which my feelings, even in childhood ardent and enthusiastic, rested, with the longing aspi-

rations of impassioned attachment. My parents were indeed to me but a name—but it was a name in which, to my youthful imagination, was centered all that is venerable, sweet, and holy. I pictured the transports of my return, I anticipated a father's blessing, a mother's smile, till fancy, wearied with her own exertions, seemed to droop, dispirited, at the long interval that must elapse before the delicious indulgence of feelings, so long repressed, could be permitted. A part of their energy found employment in friendship, and Constance de Louvigny was my sister in mind, in thought, and sentiment.

"I had just attained my sixteenth year, and my parents, impatient to embrace me, had written to give me notice that my brother would soon arrive to conduct me back to my native country, when the sudden and unforeseen decease of my mother defeated all my hopes, and taught me to mourn in death, a blessing which, in life, I had scarcely ever enjoyed. Observing that this event delayed his de-

parture from England, and that the double disappointment preyed heavily on my spirits; Constance prevailed on her mother to invite me to her house at the same time that she herself was to be removed from the convent, and, my father's consent being obtained, we soon found ourselves beneath Madame de Louvigny's hospitable roof.

"The mansion was within a few leagues of Paris; and the amusements, of which I occasionally partook, tended to remove the dejection into which I had sunk; and had perhaps additional fascinations for a heart new to pleasure, and accustomed previously to the most absolute seclusion. But it was soon decreed that her house, in the country, was to be the centre from which I was to date all my enjoyments.

"The countess lived on ill terms with her eldest son; but her second, the idol of his mother, the favourite brother of Constantia, was daily expected from the army. He arrived, and day seemed too short for

the happiness of relatives so long divided—it closed in the midst of pleasing pastime, or affectionate discourse. Oh dangerous nights!—nights passed at Vezelai, nights marked by the enchanting presence of Volange! why is not your short and fatal course for ever blotted from my memory? To the lively glow of youth and gaiety he united a depth, a refinement of feeling, a susceptibility of strong and romantic attachment, which is supposed more peculiarly to distinguish our country. A shade of impetuosity, with which it was accompanied, I viewed with thoughtless admiration, not foreseeing the excesses it might lead to; my heart exulted in a vain presumptuous pleasure, to see that haughty spirit cower in its proudest flight, before a look, a tear of mine.

"My brother still did not come, and I no longer accused time, as formerly, for retarding the object of my wishes.

"I imagined I was growing resigned, when in reality, a culpable indifference to all that had the worthiest claim on my

affections, was stealing over my heart. Confining to the narrow circle around it, all its hopes and wishes, it still palpitated; but it was for a new object; it still formed vague dreams of happiness, but those dear and absent relatives, whose image had so long soothed the languor of my secluded life, were no longer their centre. One passion gaining upon me with rapidly increasing force, made me forget my friends, my country, and my God.

"At length my brother came; I gave him a reception I thought kind, but which was cold, compared to the fraternal delight he expressed upon embracing me: but when he talked of leaving Vezelai, my bosom could not vibrate in unison with the feelings that hastened his return; and tears alone betrayed I left all my heart had learnt to value within those walls. My brother viewed Volange with a jaundiced eye; and his distinguished endowments seemed to him crimes, since they had turned me from my dearest duties. Madame de Louvigny was our

friend. She pleaded our mutual attachment; asked if a father, whom he represented as so fondly partial to his children, could refuse his consent to a union so desirable?—My brother vented his rage and disappointment, in all that violence of invective in which, even in youth, when carried away by gusts of passion, he too frequently indulged. The great superiority of his years gave, to his reproaches, the force of those coming from a parent. I could only weep and promise to submit. He desired to be left alone with me.

"'You feign submission, Clara,' he said, in a hurried voice, 'but it is to gain time.' Shocked at the imputation of treachery being added to that of weakness, I disavowed the meanness he attributed to me, with an eagerness which seemed to make some impression on him.

"'You have it in your power,' he said, 'to atone for the past—Volange is absent from Vezelai—This will spare you the great danger of a parting scene.—Write to him with your own hand an eternal

farewell—and be in readiness to depart with me to-morrow.' Ashamed of my weakness, which he had set before me in its strongest light; anxious to justify the good opinion of a parent who, he assured me, would never consent to my union with a foreigner, I found no argument strong enough to oppose to the pressing instances he used; and, with a trembling hand, and a heart that bled at each line that it traced, I wrote to Volange the mandate of cold prudence, that forbade him to think of me more, in language that my brother himself suggested, or rather partly dictated to me as I sat. The next day, when the hour arrived which was to bear me from the scene of all my pains and pleasures, he saw how unable I was to make the exertion his sudden summons required; all his harshness vanished in a moment, at the sight of the bodily and mental sufferings I endured, his natural goodness of heart gained the ascendancy, and his countenance expressed the alarm and pity that he felt.

"'I have been harsh to you, Clara,' he said, 'when my only wish was to promote your real advantage. The hope of my life was to see you fortunately established in our native country. Perhaps I view it with too proud and exclusive a partiality; I am an Englishman; and I own I glory in the title, and to see my sister wedded to an alien—— Yet still I am your brother, not your parent. I feel I was wrong in attempting to control your inclinations. Those were most to blame who placed you in a scene, where such connections were the only ones you could form. If your happiness depends upon a union with Volange, I no longer oppose myself to it; I will do more, I will endeavour to obtain our father's consent.'

"What could I say? I wept, I kissed the hand of that dear brother who, for my sake, had consented to sacrifice the prejudices inwoven with his existence, the wishes most dear to his heart. Overcome with excess of joy, I knew not what steps were most proper to be taken; I could

fix on no plan; when my brother, lamenting his past violence, told me I must again write to my lover. 'Though grievously offended no doubt,' he said, 'his must be that kind of resentment which finds its happiness in giving way. Nay write,' he continued, forcing a smile, 'it is fit that the hand which gave the blow should also apply the cure.'

"I obeyed;—still let me dwell upon that moment—the last I ever enjoyed of worldly pleasure; that moment in which I said, with timid haste, 'Return, Volange, return to thy Clara, for now her duty and her passion are reconciled.'

"The letter reached its destination—one hour sooner, and it would have been the bearer of peace and joy.—It arrived too late. The wretched Volange was no more. The coldness and unexpected change of a woman he had so fondly adored he could not survive. In the brilliant circles of Paris he had imbibed, in all their fatal extent, those pernicious principles, which give to each individual

a power over his own existence; and that spirit, which was alike unable to brook neglect or control, had voluntarily burst its bondage, and carried its proud, vindictive passions, uncalled, before the throne of the Most High."

Clara paused—and Matilda, shocked at the communication she had drawn forth, still more shocked at the idea of the pain she must have inflicted, endeavoured in vain to conquer her own emotion, in order to soothe that, which she conceived, must be the pain of her friend; but she remarked with surprise, that though the nun's voice trembled, and her countenance was pale, no trace of passion passed over it—it rather bore the meek expression of saint-like pity, such as might move an angel's breast at a mortal scene of woe. Matilda entreated her not to continue her history.

"Shall I have survived the reality," said Clara, faintly smiling, "and tremble after a lapse of years at the picture? The bitterness of my sufferings is past; and I

shall soon hasten to relate to you the mercies by which they were followed. I was hurried away from the lamentations of my friend, from the sufferings of her mother, in a state of delirium or insensibility, I know not which, that was the only thing that preserved my life. But on my arrival in England, neither the change of scene, nor the affectionate solicitude of a parent, who had been so long the object of my thoughts and wishes, could for a moment rouse my mind from the gloomy torpor, which had succeeded the first paroxysms of despair. Remorse added its sting to affliction—I considered myself as the murderer of Volange—as the murderer of his soul; and in the short and hurried slumbers that broke the misery of the day, his unforgiven spirit, reproaching me for the penance it endured, was ever before me. These harrowing ideas, which the belief in which I had been educated, forbade me to banish, poisoned every source of pleasure, and rendered even the exercises of that holy religion,

once my sweetest solace, distasteful to me. —I prayed without hope—I arose without relief. I thought myself too unhappy to look for consolation in that resource which afforded it to others. It was for those who were still in possession of some valued blessing, to return thanks—for those who looked forward, at least, to some mitigation of their sufferings, to put up prayer. I looked upon life with more than indifference,—with disgust; and considered death as the termination of a dreary journey, in which I was useless to others, and hateful to myself. Sometimes, roused by a human feeling of impatience from the gloomy resignation, or rather despondency, into which I had sunk, I would endeavour to shake off the load of sorrow, that, like an enemy pursuing me, seemed to press, to weigh down, to overwhelm my heart. The fanciful and the happy, talk of the joy of grief, the luxury of woe; but the very terms they use, shew that it is not cherished in the bosom, till it has lost its name and character. No—against real,

long protracted grief, we feel an impatience, a weariness, almost a resentment, which proves it an alien to the natural feelings of our souls, formed to aspire after a felicity, which it only forfeits by error; and recovers, never again to have it endangered, in an eternal world.—This happiness I was nearest enjoying, at the moment I thought myself abandoned to despair. In an illness brought on by the dreadful sufferings of my mind, a vision was graciously vouchsafed to me, which opened my eyes to my real situation; and showed me its dangers, only that I might avoid them. It seemed to me, that my disembodied soul was released from its frail and suffering tenement; and that, surrounded by myriads of spirits, it was awaiting the decision that should award its final doom. A door was opened in the heavens, which discovered to me a blaze of insufferable brightness; and those happy spirits whose deeds were approved passed me in multitudes, celebrating their joy in the sweetest harmonies, as they ad-

vanced to plunge and lose themselves for ever in that sea of light. Others filled the air with cries, as they heard themselves condemned to inexpressible torments, the just reward of their crimes. I shuddered to hear their hopeless lamentations; but all sympathy and curiosity was soon swallowed up in anxiety on my own account; and I demanded, with tears, to know my fate, amid this general and awful distribution. At that moment I heard a voice say, in a low, mournful tone, 'Poor wayward creature! Thy life was not stained by any crime—not marked by any exertion of active virtue. The sufferings by which an eternity of happiness might have been purchased, thou hast neglected to improve. Given up to passion, with a soul wholly bent on the contemplation of an earthly object, thou hast lived in the forgetfulness of that source, from which at once thy blessings and thy woes have flowed. Innocent of intentional crime, thou shalt escape the tortures of the guilty—Unworthy of the crown of virtue,

no punishment awaits thee but to be excluded from the sphere of that perfection to which thou hast never aspired." The voice ceased, and a cloud—a veil—a curtain—thick, dark, impenetrable, appeared between me and all my soul loved, to remain, I was conscious, for ever. I found myself alone, at a distance from the confines of our world, in a vast region of uninhabited air, without boundary, form, colour.

"The sensation of darkness and solitude, which, at that moment, struck upon my heart, carried with it a feeling of misery, of which I should in vain endeavour to give you the slightest idea. Let it suffice that what I suffered when first deprived of Volange, was bliss compared to it. Conceive the impression of dismay, of anguish and repentance, with which the intelligence would be received that we had, by our own folly, missed the greatest earthly good, the highest possible exaltation; some good that might but a moment before have been secured, but which

was now irreparably, irrecoverably gone. With a sensation something resembling that, but as far surpassing it in degree as the object that had escaped me surpassed what this world has most glorious, I heard my righteous doom. With the sense of my loss came that of the meanness of the object, which my mad passion had magnified into importance sufficient to enter into competition with my eternal bliss; and it was to this I had sacrificed the short hour allotted to me.

"One day was past, and I might have lived for ever at the fountain of those perfections, have tasted at their spring those pleasures ever renewing, which overwhelm without oppressing the heart; and now I was exiled for eternity from the vision of that divine and glorious presence, the end and object of my being; that unknown good to which, through life, my unsatisfied aspirations had, though unconsciously, tended; that beauty, of which all that is great or lovely upon earth, is but the faint and feeble representation. With

faculties enlarged beyond measure, those faculties only served to shew, to my still increasing anguish and confusion, the immensity of the loss I had sustained. I endured no pains—no penance was inflicted—the sense of privation—of eternal privation and banishment from *his* sight, in the love and contemplation of whom is bliss supreme, included within itself the bitterness of every other torment.

"It was not for a soul still imprisoned in mortal mould, to endure it long: I started wildly from my couch, my frame trembling, my heart panting, my eyes pouring torrents of tears, exclaiming in grateful ecstacy, as I gasped for breath, 'It is yet time!' The attendants that surrounded me were alarmed, and thought my intellects were still disturbed by some horrid dream. Alas, it was the first time I awoke from a dream, in which, for many months, I had been lost. It was soon perceived, by the alteration in my conduct, that some revolution had taken place in my mind. The desire I had to recover my health,

and the willingness with which I adopted every means to attain that end, contributed to its speedy re-establishment. My mind was now the abode of peace and thankfulness; and, oh! in this, the beginning of my conversion, how soothing was the thought—more than the thought—the conviction with which I was often filled, that at length Volange was happy; happy in consequence of my repentance and mental devotion, which had atoned for his presumptuous crime. By degrees, though he never ceased to have my pity, his image no longer mingled with my prayers; one object possessing every thought, wish, and affection of my soul, swallowed up all others in its superior claims. I began to be impatient of the forms of common life, which still prevented me from giving myself entirely up to them.

"The rest of my history you know. In that convent where I had been brought up, two years after I quitted, full of youthful hope, its peaceful walls, I took

the vow which was to confine me within them for ever. But it was otherwise decreed; and Heaven is my witness that when anxiety for my safety conducted once more to my convent grate the beloved brother, to whom I thought I had bid an eternal adieu, my own distresses less engrossed my mind, than the change my peculiar situation had wrought in his. I was struck by the strange and singular contrast. The settled sadness that now dwelt on his countenance shewed to the most careless observer, that he never ceased to regret my imaginary sacrifice; while mine expressed that content, which I had never tasted, till I made the election he deplored."

"And were you as happy in England?" enquired Matilda.

"No," replied Clara, "for I was less useful. You smile, but surely our recluse life did not prevent us from being in many ways beneficial to our fellow creatures. Ours was not one of those orders to whom is assigned the sacred charge of soothing

the last hours of the sick, and preparing the winged spirit for its ascent to Heaven. Yet, though denied that satisfaction, I found one inferior, but still grateful to my feelings, in contributing to impart the advantages of the education I had received, to those who yet might be in need of instruction. It is only in being useful that we can be happy. Yet still I am content; and every day I bless that gracious Power who enlightened me on the subject of my destiny, and who granted to me the only means of obliterating the past—a life devoted to his praise and service."

Perhaps the perfect self-devotion of Clara, the effect of an imaginary warning from Heaven, acting upon a heart too tender and afflicted, a spirit too enthusiatic and susceptible to resist its influence, was a sacrifice rather to be lamented than applauded. Yet still, was there not something in the sentiments she had expressed, which Matilda might apply as a guide and rule to herself? The last words of

the recluse, upon the subject of the necessity of active virtue, particularly struck her.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "it would be little if the whole of my unvalued life were one long prayer for thee, Strathallan. If my days were consigned to the hopelessness of despondency, my nights to the tears and the phantoms of despair, it would be little thus to mourn thee, if I lived for myself alone; but when I think on her, whose widowed heart turns to me alone on earth for consolation, that indulgence which before was scarcely innocent, becomes, indeed, a crime. Sweet Clara, your greater sufferings shall teach me to blush for the weakness, which made me yield so easily to mine; and you, my mother, shall find your counsels have not fallen on an ungrateful ear—have not been bestowed on one, who shrinks from the occasion which should put their value to the test. For your sake my mind shall resume its energies; for your sake it shall exert its every power to war against the

weight of woe that still oppresses it. I will remember, that, though contentment be removed far from me, the reward of virtue may still be mine; and when tempted to murmur at my trials, will recall the words of Clara, that, 'to be useful is to be happy.'"

CHAP. IX.

I wander through the night,
When all but me take rest,
And the moon's soft beams fall piteously
Upon my troubled breast.

MISS BAILLIE. *Ethwald.*

MATILDA had hardly time to strengthen herself in these praiseworthy resolutions, when she was called upon to try their force in action. On being summoned the following morning to attend a visitor in the parlour, she was startled at seeing her cousin, Sir Harold: the servant had not named him to her, or she had not caught his name. Her mother's presence, however, abated the involuntary terror with which he would otherwise have inspired her. But it was not easy long to retain terror, or even to harbour resentment, against her unhappy cousin. There

was something so helplessly interesting in his wildly mournful wanderings, so attaching in the affectionate earnestness of his look, whenever he addressed her, that it was impossible, when in his presence, to recollect he was the fatal obstacle to her most distant hope of happiness;—the evil genius that threatened with destruction the opening bud of promised joy, even if it should dare to expand, after the storm that marked its early morning.

Sir Harold looked ill and fatigued; but his manner, now singularly calm, if not collected, contrasted, in Matilda's mind but too forcibly, with the terrific violence, which in their last interview had given her peace such a fatal blow. "You are surprised, my fair cousin," he said, "to see me so soon returned, and it is true I must not long remain with you; they already begin to murmur at my stay. But though not free often to move, I must indulge sometimes in a short wandering from the circle where I am bound. It is now a month since I have seen you, and

in that space of time I have traced a thousand miles."

On Mrs. Melbourne's expressing her surprise at what she heard, for she did not know of his having been any where but in Derbyshire, he explained that the constant exercise he took, both day and night, around the spot that he inhabited there, was alone what he alluded to.

"Yes," he continued, "since I must not rove from place to place, it is that shall be my abode. If I must be chained, let me be chained to my rock, for enchantment marks the scene; and sure some blessed spirit embalms the air, where once it wandered through those green recesses." He looked wistfully at Matilda. "In the wild walks and winding groves I trace the steps of beauty, but no where can I trace the haunts of love. My servants follow me," he added, "and when night comes on would persuade me to return: they sometimes use submissions, and sometimes" (his countenance changed) "even threaten violence to their lord.

Poor silly souls! They know not that they would rob me of the sweetest, most balmy hour; and that, sleep I believe you call it, on which they set such value, I never get—I never need!" and he uttered the last expression with an air of wild triumph. Then, as if suddenly recollecting the purport of his visit, he turned to Miss Melbourne, and said, "I wished to prepare you, my dear cousin, for presenting *you* to-morrow with a gift, the most precious I could possibly bestow. Will you receive it at my hands?"

"We must know what it is first," interrupted Mrs. Melbourne, with a good-humoured smile.

Sir Harold shook his head, changed the subject, and conversed for an hour so agreeably, upon indifferent topics, that he would have pleased and prepossessed any one in his favour, who had not been acquainted with his unhappy derangement. Before he took leave he promised, on the following day, to return with the treasure,

and left his fair relatives rather curious to know of what it might consist.

The next day at an early hour Sir Harold called; he had in his hand a little girl, who appeared hardly ten years of age, of a countenance prepossessing in the highest degree, and the most angelic beauty. Sir Harold looked earnestly at Matilda, "I would have given you my own soul," he said, "but you despised the worthless gift. I know I have nothing to offer that is worthy of you; but what is dearest to me on earth I will give you: take her—she is yours. Had I aught more precious it should be added to it: but she is the sister of my soul: the orphan child of my mother."

Matilda kindly spoke to the little girl, who stood trembling and dismayed on hearing this singular address. The sweetness of her manner seemed a little to dissipate the alarm of her young cousin. She then turned to Sir Harold, hardly knowing how to understand conduct so

singular and unexpected; but before she could ask an explanation he had arisen to depart. Julia Melbourne threw herself into his arms, bathed in tears, "Oh, do not you too abandon me, my brother!" He was deaf to the piercing cry which sensibility seemed to have attuned to tenderness, to foreboding anguish, beyond what her years should have known. "Turn to that lady," said he: "you are no longer mine; she is in future to command you."

"I accept the trust," said Matilda; and, taking the interesting little stranger by the hand, she retired with her to her own apartment. Left to herself, Julia threw herself upon a bed, and gave vent to a torrent of tears.

Matilda tried by every gentle art to sooth and console. "Do not grieve so, my love," she said. "I hope you have not been taught to fear your cousins?—"

"No, no," replied Julia, sobbing, "it is not that—but to see my brother so strange—so very strange. What a sad

misfortune has befallen him! he that was so gentle—so good."

At length Miss Melbourne succeeded in a degree in calming the agitated spirits of the little girl, and learning from her some of the particulars that had preceded this singular scene. Julia Melbourne was but recently out of mourning for her father; she had been left since the death of her mother, which had taken place about three years before, under the care of a worthy woman, who acted in the capacity of house-keeper at Mosscliff Abbey; but who remained with her more in the character of a governess than a domestic. Her original prospects had been better, and her education qualified her in a great measure to supply the place of a parent to the young orphan.

"She said she had promised mamma to do so," Julia continued. "Mrs. Carlyle was a good woman, and I never regretted our solitary life at the Abbey. After we lost my dear father, my brother kept her on at Moss-cliff. He had only me with

him when he went to take possession of his new house; but he soon sent for Mrs. Carlyle to stay with me while he went to town.

"He came back from London quite joyous, and said he would introduce me to my cousin, who would be a sister to me; and who, of all the women he had ever seen, alone resembled my dear mamma."

Of her mother's accomplishments and instructions, (though she had lost her at so tender an age) Julia seemed to retain a lively and distinct remembrance; and her frequent allusions to them, revived in Matilda a curiosity which had been often excited, but had never yet been gratified. From the time she had been introduced to the circle, in which such a name excited interest, she had always understood that Lady Julia Melbourne, (who seemed to have been suddenly hurried into neglect and oblivion more complete than is usual with those who have once imparted

lustre to society), had been, at one period, considered as the "mirror of fashion;" her taste undisputed, her beauty allowed pre-eminence, even where beauty most prevailed. The poet, the sculptor, the engraver, emulated each other in perpetuating her charms by their exertions, and referring their claims on fame to her arbitration. No novelty, from the turn of a head-dress to the composition of an ode, obtained currency till it had passed the ordeal of her decision. No young aspirant in the walks of science, of taste, or of politics, was supposed to have his claims confirmed, till he had been introduced to the lovely Lady Julia Melbourne. Her house, her equipages, her dress, her air, even her attitudes in waltzing, playing the harp, in the exercise of her theatric talent, or the more unassuming graces of private life, were the objects, among her own sex, of fruitless admiration and competition; in which might be truly applied to her Voltaire's expression,

respecting the unfortunate Henrietta of England, " *Toutes les femmes l'imitaient, et nulle ne la ressemblait.*"

Matilda had heard she had been educated abroad, and Julia confirmed it. " I believe she was born there," she said: " she had several foreign servants. Her own woman, Lavinia, was a Florentine, and she used to shed such tears on her bosom. She promised to teach me Italian soon, that I might know what they were talking about, and she had already taught me French. She took such pains to make me recite it. I still remember the lines she loved best:" and with a sensibility and energy, as surprising as the grace and propriety of the gesture with which she enforced them, Julia Melbourne repeated out of Racine's Britannicus the four lines, beginning

" Combien de fois, hélas! puisqu'il faut vous le dire
Mon cœur de son désordre allait—il vous instruire?
De combien de soupirs interrompant le cours
Ai-je evité vos yeux, que je cherchais toujours!"

Matilda, in admiring the spirit and ex-

pression she gave them, was no less struck with the infantine innocence which accompanied that expression. Her voice was indeed modulated to the tones of impassioned softness; but it was evidently passion that the ear had caught from another, without returning its echo from the heart.

"I often saw her perform in that play," continued Julia, "for she acted in French quite as easily as she did in English; and she said that when I grew up I should be the Junia, for that she was a poor little interesting princess—very young—yet very hardly treated. Poor mamma! she wished to teach me every thing she could —she loved me so—." There was frequently something serious, even solemn, in Julia's manner; though it had nothing formed or decisive, like that of a woman. Great sensibility, like grief, anticipates the progress of time. A family air of dignity and beauty, that distinguished her features, unanimated by the glow of complexion, rendered her appearance at

once interesting and striking; while their extreme regularity and marked expression, would have been rather unfavourable, at such an early period, to the promise of their future perfection, but for the softness and delicacy every lineament possessed. Her air, her gestures, the plaintive sweetness of her tones, and the impressive earnestness with which she often spoke, altogether gave the idea of a matured but beatified spirit, inhabiting the infantine and innocent frame, and inspiring the countenance of a child.

Sir Harold did not return again for several days, and Julia had forgot the name of the hotel where they had stopped; so that they were unable to make any enquiry respecting him, and it remained uncertain whether he was not gone back to the Rocks.

"What an attaching creature," said Mrs. Melbourne to her daughter, "is your little pale beauty, your ivory maid! She is absolutely Mrs. Barbauld's exquisite personification of Pity. Poor Lady

Julia! She seems, by a strange fatality, to have studied the unhappiness of her children, by too early cultivating in them both every taste that has a tendency to increase that exquisite susceptibility that nature has given them already in too great a degree for happiness. But what do you intend to do with your little charge when you see her brother again?"

"To keep her!" returned Matilda firmly.

"To keep her?"

"Yes, he gave her to me, and I have mentally ratified the engagement. Can you disapprove of it, my mother? She has experienced the greatest loss, in that of a parent: I will endeavour," she continued with fervour, "to supply her place."

"But have you considered well, Matilda; have you thought of the importance—the responsibility attached to such a task?—"

"I have; but I thought also of her forlorn situation. We are her only female relatives. Who can contemplate

without horror her being left to her ill-fated brother, given up to regret, to melancholy, to a sensibility, that, if ill-directed, may become the source of torments so exquisite?" Matilda paused; but her trembling lips and agitated voice, shewed the picture she had drawn was not quite from imagination.

"Amiable girl!" said Mrs. Melbourne, embracing her, "how I joy to see you looking around amid the wreck of our own happiness, to some being more unfortunate, on whom to exert the benevolence of that kind, affectionate heart! trust me, while possessed of it, you have still a store of joy; far be it from me to oppose its dictates; much we can not do—but our time, our talents, we can still command; and, for the number of pensioners that waited at our door, if one little innocent be snatched from evils more dreadful than poverty, Heaven will not disregard the offering, however unequal to our wishes—will not despise the tribute of the orphan and the widow." The

allusion she had made recalled a subject, on which Mrs. Melbourne had not yet learned to speak without tears; and Matilda mingled her sorrows with those of her mother, to the memory of a parent so tenderly and justly beloved; till the recollection of the new duties, in which she had engaged, taught her to dry them, and to seek in active exertion a remedy against vain regret.

She had not devoted herself a week to her new employment, before she experienced in her amended health and spirits, the truth of the maxim which Clara had so earnestly endeavoured to enforce.

Julia and the fair nun were mutually pleased with each other. Julia found it impossible to feel timidity at the aspect of gentleness like Clara's; and Clara, who fancied she discovered in her style of beauty, a resemblance to her still beloved Constance De Louvigny, was never tired making her presents of sweet-meats and embroidery, out of the remains of her once ample convent stores. The little

stranger quickly became domesticated; and the re-appearance of Sir Harold, lately so much the object of her wishes, threatened to inspire her with more terror than satisfaction. He said he had been ill, and that was the cause of his having been so long absent from his fair friends. "It is a fever," he said, "which sometimes seizes me; and then in my dreams I fancied I wanted my Julia, and I could not recollect where I had left her. So I came here to look for her, and take her away."

"You are very welcome to be here," said Mrs. Melbourne, endeavouring to speak to her unhappy cousin with cheerfulness: "but as to your sister, you must not take her away you know, for you gave her to my daughter." Sir Harold looked surprised.

"Yes," resumed Matilda with an angelic smile, "and I have adopted her from that moment."

Again Sir Harold paused; he put his hand to his head, and seemed to try to

recall some half forgotten images to his memory, but in vain. At length, with a deep sigh, he shook his head, and exclaimed "it is gone; but if you say I did so, my fair cousin, I am satisfied, for your words are truth: and will you," he continued, as if suddenly struck with the greatness of the benefit she would confer, "will you, indeed, be guardian, friend to my more than orphan sister? Teach her to be all that is good and amiable—to be like yourself?—Will you be to her an elder sister?—ah, why not her sister in reality? Are we not already related? Matilda, lovely cousin, am I not yours; and, being so near to you, can I be indeed the wretch you think me? You complain that I pursue you with my passion. Ah, Matilda! am I to blame, in wishing to draw closer the strong bonds of nature, by the still dearer ties of love?" Though pained by the turn he had given to the conversation, what most struck Miss Melbourne in all that had passed, was Sir Harold's expression, "more than

orphan sister." From Julia she could of course gain no elucidation; she only repeated that his manner was often strange, and that to her, as to others, he often spoke wildly and unintelligibly.

"And was he always so?" Matilda enquired.

"Oh, no—not always—but since he has been abroad!"

"And do you know the reason?"

"No; but I think it must be something that happened to him there."

"Fatal absence!" thought Matilda. "How often does the wanderer from his country bring back some hidden woe, which, though secret its source, poisons the remainder of his days." She recalled the imputed dejection of Strathallan, which had always been traced to the period of his return from Spain. "Ah, why are we tempted," she cried "to leave a home of love? do not the sufferings that so often ensue, seem to follow like avengers, to chide the vain curiosity, or

wasteful ambition, that won the heart from domestic pleasures?"

From such reflections she was not sorry to be roused, by another visit from Sir Harold; who came quite gay and animated, with the prospectus of their day's amusement. He made it a point that Mrs. Melbourne and Matilda should take the two vacant seats in his carriage, alleging, with a smile, that it was the only way of reconciling the little timid Julia, to venturing abroad with her violent brother. Julia joined her earnest entreaties, and Mrs. Melbourne, who thought a little recreation might be of service to her daughter's health, without much hesitation consented.

After stopping at one or two of the public exhibitions, that were open at that time, and having spent the morning in that manner, not without amusement, Sir Harold told them there was one more place, which, if they were not tired, he wished them to visit before they returned

home; and pulling the check, as they arrived before the door of a house of genteel appearance, in a street in the most fashionable part of the town, he assisted the ladies to alight. He conducted them through several rooms, but still they did not perceive any thing worthy of attracting their curiosity.

"Pray, good people, what is to be seen here!" said Mrs. Melbourne, with affected spirits, to conceal a kind of vague alarm she felt, at the conduct of the eccentric baronet.

"The professor is above stairs, I believe."

"Is he to give us a lecture on astronomy, or hydrostatics; or are we at a painter's? Do, dear Sir Harold, explain; for I think we have reined in the impatience of female curiosity for a sufficient time."

"Look around you," said Sir Harold. "How do you like it all?"

"Very well. Still I see nothing but chintz curtains, and white draperies, and

Venetian blinds, and marble chimney-pieces, and Brussels carpets, and glasses, and chairs, and tables."

"Well, and what could you see better?" resumed the baronet with great gravity. "But I am wrong: I should have introduced you before to the mistress of the house;" and taking her by the arm, he led her to the other end of the room, where stood a large mirror: "Look at her," he said, "is she not amiable? and she is, I assure you, as good as she is lovely. Am I not right in bringing you better acquainted? for you are still ignorant, I am sure, of half her merits. She has laid me under an obligation," he continued, putting his hand to his heart, "which, however this wandering, treacherous memory may sometimes deny, will never be forgotten here." As he said these words he had dropt the animated tone of fanciful gallantry, in which he had begun to speak, for one of the deepest emotion.

Startled, pleased, surprised, Mrs. Mel-

bourne hesitated before she could immediately frame an answer to so unexpected an address.

"Nay, nay, I will have it so," he continued, anticipating the objections that she appeared about to make. "If I am to be robbed of my Julia, I will have her in a more airy situation, near the parks, and some square, where she may inhale something bearing the resemblance of fresh air. I could not otherwise venture my little Northumbrian with you; it is to her you owe all this."

Mrs. Melbourne easily saw through the delicacy that dictated this remark, and doubted whether the relationship Sir Harold stood in to her family, would not warrant her accepting this proof of the generous interest he took in it.

"From the moment you talked of keeping my sister with you," pursued the baronet, "I perceived the inconvenience she must be to you in that small lodging, and I instantly began to look about for a house which would suit you; this I found

ready furnished, and took for a year; and then (if it still pleases you) take it for ever."

The ladies did not long delay to take possession of their new residence. Throughout, there reigned an air of modest elegance, peculiarly suited to the feelings and taste of Mrs. Melbourne. There was a pretty garden behind the house, and there, with a book in her hand, or the prattle of the little innocent Julia, she beguiled many an otherwise tedious hour. Sir Harold had promised to visit them soon, to see how they liked their new abode. They now received him with pleasure, and in the course of his different visits, he gave them his opinion with earnestness, on some subjects connected with the education of his sister. Observing with what rapt attention she hung upon Matilda's harp, and listened to her when accompanying it with her voice, "She is tremblingly alive to the charms of harmony, Miss Melbourne," he said, glancing a look of anxiety at the little girl.

Then, after a pause, he continued, "her talent for music is as great as her taste; I have no fear indeed of her excelling in every accomplishment under yours, as under a mother's care. But, my fair cousin, let it be your first, your greatest solicitude, to watch the unfolding bias of her mind; cultivate in her, before all things, that strict regard to decorum, that shrinking delicacy, the surest safe-guard of all true dignity, without which all female loveliness, grace, and talent, serve but to adorn a splendid ruin; the more conspicuous, to be the more deplored." Some painful remembrance seemed to arise in his mind as he pronounced these words; and he quickly turned from the distressing subject to announce his intended departure for the Rocks. "I ought to have been there a month ago," he said, "but I know not how it is, the spell that used to bind me to my rock is now transferred to this Persepolis,* this fascinating city, 'too guilty and too pleasing to be either

* Voltaire's Novel.

spared or destroyed.' I must tear myself from it, or it will tear me from myself; and it seems my workmen are all gone mad, and want my presence; they have hardly done any thing, since I have been here, to the great bason, or towards levelling the mount, or ——"

"The estate will be so much improved," Mrs. Melbourne observed, forcing a smile, "that if I should ever visit the neighbourhood of the Rocks again, I should hardly know it."

"No, no, not much improved," Sir Harold resumed, in a tone of sudden and surprising indifference. "But one must have some object; one must do something. Adieu, Julia," he then said, "I shall hope to see you in the summer. Can you, do you think, remember your rambling brother till then?"

Julia looked earnestly at him, her eyes filled with tears; "Remember!" she repeated, while an expression of infantine simplicity added grace to the artless energy of her manner—"*for ever!*"

Sir Harold seemed affected :—" and you, Matilda ?" he said,—" yet do not answer," he continued, preventing the reply that faltered on her lips. " I know what you would say—yet do not say it; for the conviction of your indifference does not strike so cold on my heart, as would your uttered refusal. Wherever I wander, I have one consolation—your image, which, far kinder than yourself, refuses not to accompany me. It is a talisman that keeps from me every thing wretched, noxious, or unholy. Must it not be so, for has not the Maker's hand impressed it with each different attribute of perfection ?" It was thus that in his wildest bursts of passion, some expression, some allusion, in which a beam of fancy gleamed between, proved the wreck before them to be that of a once elegant imagination and cultivated taste.

It was not without emotion that Matilda received his farewell. Fixing his eyes upon her with melancholy stedfastness, " I go," he said, " to my lonely

rock, to that which fronts the window where you used to sleep; and then when I sigh, and think how soon my short course was ended, the cool air speaks repose to my soul; and the darkness around seems to whisper, Matilda at that moment may think of me with pity. Adieu, thou best and loveliest! Remember," and his countenance changed to the fierce expression that once thrilled to her heart with terror, "though never to be mine, bonds strong as death secure thee from ever giving thy love to any other."

CHAP. X.

"Un beau visage est le plus beau de tous les spectacles, et l'harmonie la plus douce est le son de la voix de celle que l'on aime."

LA BRUYERE.

AND where was Strathallan while Matilda, introduced to new connexions, united by the ties of mutual obligation to that part of her family with which she had been till lately unacquainted, tasted some few pleasures, and suffered many a bitter pang, of which he was not the source? His mind had, like hers, endured a revolution since they parted; and he had become strengthened in a determination to forget her, which seemed now equally necessary to his honor and his repose. Whether it would stand the test of renewed intercourse, remained still to be decided.

Sir Harold allowed his sister every advantage that the best masters could afford, and though averse to exposing her delicate health to the dangers of crowds and late hours, was yet so far indulgent to her favorite taste, as to request Mrs. Melbourne would in the course of the season take her to one opera; an amusement respecting which she had expressed a vehement curiosity.

The fashionable winter had set in, and Matilda reminded her mother of this promise.

"We must think about tickets," said Mrs. Melbourne; "the time is past since I had them pouring in upon me for Lady Such-a-one's box, and Mrs. Such-a-one's box. How many faces that used to welcome me with smiles now look on me as on a stranger! London is altered much since I lived in it at my father's house, and I am altered. The connexions I had, I neglected to cultivate. I gave up the world for one person; it is fair the world in its turn should give me up."

It was agreed they should try for tickets at Hookham's; and, taking Julia by the hand, Matilda set out, attended by a servant. She was just crossing over to the library, when she was stopped by the run of carriages, which happened at that moment to be very great, and stood fearful of venturing till she had let them pass. These crossings were to Matilda, as to every timid person unused to walking in London, a great annoyance; at the moment she thought she had found a favourable opportunity for venturing, a dashing equipage from the other end of the street suddenly appeared, driving towards her with such fury, that she relapsed into timidity and uncertainty, and holding the trembling Julia by the hand, remained, though fully conscious of the awkwardness of her situation, with her foot still lingering on the kirb-stone, when the name of Lady Torrendale caught her attention; and, turning round, she perceived a tall footman in a crimson and gold li-

very, which she instantly recognised for her ladyship's, who was running after the coroneted equipage with almost equal speed.

"Whither away, Lawrence, so fast?" cried one of his comrades, who was passing more leisurely along.

"Oh, for the life of you, James, don't be after stopping me now! Here's my Lady Torrendale wants to pay a visit to Lady Lyndhurst." Having just overtaken the carriage, which was empty, and chucked a visiting card into it, he rejoined his companion, who asked him, "Are the Torrendales in town, then?"

"Yes; the old one and his lady, these six weeks and better, preparing every thing for the young lord's marriage. An ugly thing, to my fancy; but a power of money."

"And Spencer?"

"Oh, he can't come among us—still under the hatches—in Cumberland, I think they say; but I can't be staying

all day with you, or else I'll never be returning, and cook will be mad. Why don't you come see her?"

"Why, what has she got?"

"A round of beef, a pye, some veal—Come, have a snack."

"I don't care if I do. I'll just step home and see what our people are about, and be with you again in a crack."

Matilda had by this time effected "a safe landing on the opposite bank," but the intelligence, of which she had by this delay been made an involuntary hearer, was of a nature to excite perturbation beyond what rolling carriages and spirited horses, however formidable those objects, could ever create; and she had entered the shop and sunk upon a seat, before she recalled to mind the business upon which she came. A polite enquiry from the master of the shop what were her commands, and if she would have a glass of water, restored her a little to herself; and she had just enquired if she could be accommodated with three tickets for the



opera that night, when the entrance of two ladies, who were laughing and talking very loud together, excited her attention. One voice she thought she knew; but by the time she raised her languid eyes, the speaker had her back turned towards her, and was making some enquiries at the other counter. Her first motion, as she took up a book that lay upon it, convinced Matilda that she was a lady of distinction; her second, as she turned round, that it was Lady Torrendale.

"Oh, Miss Melbourne! my dear girl," said she, with the most unembarrassed air, "I am truly glad to see you; how are all at home?"

Matilda had begun to reply, but her ladyship was by this time deeply engaged. The words died on Matilda's lips when she found she had no longer an auditor; and having hastily put up her tickets, she was preparing to leave the shop, when Lady Torrendale, observing the paleness of her countenance, resumed, "but how are you, my dear? you don't look well."

"Pardon me, madam," said Matilda, "I am quite well, and ——"

"One, two, three, four, five,—twenty on the list, I declare, already for the Missionary," repeated the countess, looking over a paper-book: "how provoking to be so late! I want it so much—I am dying for the Missionary. Mr. Hookham, remember to let me have that, and the Lady of the Lake, as soon as you possibly can; in the mean time, I believe, I must be content to take these," and giving some half-bound volumes to a servant to be put into her carriage, she followed, saying to her companion, as she left the shop, without another word or even look at Matilda, "I must make haste home, for I have hardly time to dress for dinner, and Strathallan promised to be with us today."

The circumstances of this short and unpleasant interview, the unkind and unfeeling manner in which her ladyship had hurried in and hurried out, made a deeper impression on Matilda's spirits than it

ought perhaps to have done. Yet one great consolation offered itself—Strathallan was still expected. He had not, then, like his mother, brought himself to spend weeks in her vicinity without a message, an enquiry respecting one lately so dear. When Miss Melbourne informed her mother of what had passed, she seemed neither surprised nor offended. "That is so like Lady Torrendale," she said: "I never thought her friendship of that substantial nature to resist the first storm of adversity; and, to do her justice, she never had a sincere regard for me."

"Perhaps, mamma," said Matilda, timidly, "she thought we knew of her arrival, and ought to have visited her first; perhaps she ——"

"Even if I had heard it, she knows I have no carriage," Mrs. Melbourne replied; "and I should not wish to force myself upon the notice of a woman vain and haughty as Lady Torrendale, in a situation inferior to that in which she remembers me."

"Oh, mamma, you would always be sufficiently superior to Lady Torrendale, however differing from her in outward circumstances."

"That was very well said, my dear, for the time of the consuls of Rome, when virtue was the only distinction, and a noble matron was sure of commanding respect from *that* circumstance alone. Were I to boast my jewels, like Cornelia, I think I could produce at least as good; but in these degenerate days, the unfortunate, who cannot conquer an inborn pride, and a certain value for themselves, must be content to nourish it in solitude, if they would escape from contempt."

In their conversations upon the world, Mrs. Melbourne and her daughter often differed. The younger lady was unwilling to believe it what the elder one knew it to be. This tempered "regard for state and wealth," which formed an ingredient in Mrs. Melbourne's character, contrasted at first rather unfavourably with the extreme openness and disinterestedness of

Matilda's disposition; who seemed to be without a thought for her future situation or a regret for her past affluence. Perhaps the difference more consisted in that of years and education, which made the daughter, if not better able to bear the slights and neglects attending upon want of fortune, at least ignorant that there were so many to be borne.

"But we must not let the overcoming disappointment of the morning make us forget the projected amusement of the evening," resumed Mrs. Melbourne, with affected spirits.

With a little of her daughter's assistance, she had soon completed her simple but becoming toilet. Matilda's was not much longer, yet never had her distinguished loveliness appeared to greater advantage. It was the first time she had gone into public since she had left off her mourning, and she was on this occasion little tempted to it, but by the desire to give pleasure to her young cousin; they now only waited the appearance of their old friend

to set forward, and Matilda was soon introduced into a scene, which, spite of her settled sadness, seemed to promise, for some moments at least, agreeably to engage her; Sowerby had taken care to place them in the centre of the pit, that they might have a good view of the house. Almost as much delighted as little Julia, with the novelty and beauty of every thing around her, Matilda was some moments without noticing that she was in the immediate neighbourhood of one of her old acquaintance; when the sound of a voice, which appeared familiar to her, exclaiming, "Bless us! how contrary; who'd ha' thought o' them people setting of themselves next us!" induced her to remark the group nearest her, and she thought she could not be mistaken in her friend Mrs. Stockwell. Was Arbella then in town also, without seeking her? a new pang struck Matilda's heart; but she perceived her friend was not of the party; and she was unwilling to ask any question respecting her of her aunt.

"Now, do ye Sam," continued that lady, "put your fashionable, large, new opera hat between them and us, that they may'nt be familiar."

Mrs. Stockwell, who was but recently come to town to "look after the money," as she termed it, for her noble patroness had already contracted new obligations to her, began endeavouring to discover if any of her titled acquaintance had entered the boxes; and asked her son the names of many others, with whose appearance she was not acquainted.

Sam, who had by this time imbibed an opinion, that his mother ought to know, or to appear to know, every body, was much distressed by these interrogatories, and named them to her "as though he named them not." Some few she acknowledged, and was noticed by them in return, Miss De Courcy, Lady Lyndhurst, Lady Kilcare. Matilda looked the way Mrs. Stockwell's eyes directed, for she remembered the names; but no similar acknowledgment ensued. That they saw

her, she could not doubt, since they used the assistance of a glass, to discover her features more clearly; but that they did not think her worth the honour of a salute, occasioned her a momentary pain, which nothing but her inexperience could justify. On the other hand, she could not be unconscious of the attention she excited among the strangers around her; and we will hope that it was pity, not vanity, prompted the smile, when she overheard a gentleman whisper Mrs. Stockwell, "who was that beautiful girl in the white satin and net?" and remarked that lady's answer, "'Pon my word, sir, I don't know; how can I tell the name of every girl as gets leave of her friends to go out and see an opera!"

"What a heavenly complexion!" resumed the stranger.

"Not natural, I can assure you, sir; to my certain knowledge Miss Melbourne puts gamboge upon her face."

"I should doubt it. You know her name, madam?"

"Pray, Sam," continued the lady, turning from the cross-questioning gentleman, "isn't that there, yonder, Lady Etherington?"

As the boxes filled, Matilda for a moment recollected the triumph Lady Torrendale, in her days of kindness, had anticipated in presenting her lovely young friend, for the first time, among the brilliant circle assembled there, and a sigh would force its way: but it was stopped in its course by the notes of the first singer in the world, and, given up to the illusion of the scene, she soon sunk or forgot the little feelings of the woman, in those of the tasteful and enlightened amateur.

Towards the middle of the entertainment, the entrance of some very distinguished personages into the stage-box, attracted all eyes towards that part of the house. "Do lend me your glass, Sam, till I make out who has got there," said Mrs. Stockwell, on the appearance of another gentleman decorated with an

English and foreign military order, "I can't extinguish him. My stars!" (a most appropriate exclamation) "I expect it is, yet it can't be him, neither; yes, it certainly is Lord Strathallan. Now he's speaking to the Prince of ——, now he's speaking to the Duke of ——; dear me, I wish he'd look this way; dear, I wish he'd let one bow to him! Do put your large, new opera hat out of the way now, Sam, there—so; I wish he'd look—"

At length Strathallan *le desiré* turned round, and *did* look, but it was not at her; in a moment he had left the persons he was with, and was at Matilda's side, while, with the most delicate and respectful tenderness, he anxiously enquired after her health and welfare since the moment of their separation. All this was effected so instantaneously, that she could hardly believe it, but by that sweet tumult at her heart, that soft surprise, giving to each meeting the charm of a first interview, the tenderness of habitual friendship, which ever announced to her the

approach of Strathallan. Attracted towards her by an irresistible impulse, the radiant joy her countenance expressed justified to him his having yielded to its suggestion: the impression of months was done away by that welcome smile, and while gazing with renewed rapture on that enchanting face, he repeated to himself, "She has not, no—she cannot have forgotten me!" Matilda, on her part, endeavoured to reason herself into a conviction, that she owed her chief pleasure to the contrast afforded by the kindness of one of her former friends, opposed to the neglect of the rest; and this innocent sophistry contributed to her serenity, and increased her satisfaction.

In the mean time, this girl, with whose name she was unacquainted, became a personage of vastly increased importance in the eyes of Mrs. Stockwell, now she had attracted the notice of the fashionable Lord Strathallan. She grew suddenly extremely uneasy lest she should find her seat too crowded, moved away to make more

room for her, while she scolded her son Sam for not jumping over the benches to find another seat for himself rather than incommode the young lady: she then attempted to obtain some share of the notice of Lord Strathallan; but he, wholly occupied with her he adored, would not for a long time be made to perceive her existence; nor was she much more successful in her attempts to attract Matilda. Strathallan, when animated by pleasure, was irresistible, and the elevation of his spirits communicated itself insensibly to her whose presence had inspired them.

Mrs. Stockwell forgot Miss Melbourne had a book of the opera,—offered her's.—"I've no use for it myself, mem," said she; "but I can't help thinking it a great inconvenience for poor people as don't understand French; but now I think of it, mem, you can't want it either." To all these contradictory remarks Matilda replied by an assenting smile; but one which did not much encourage her to pro-

ceed. The presence of Strathallan had indeed effected a revolution in every object around her. "You have surely seen my mother since her return to town," he said. Matilda hesitated; the transient interview at the library was all she had to acknowledge; he guessed the reason of that pause—that passing expression of suppressed indignation, which she had once or twice observed Lady Torrendale's conduct excite, for a moment flushed his cheek; but instantly gave way to the habitual softness of his manner when addressing her. All about her seemed to breathe of peace, of love, and joy. A dispute between two gentlemen about places, occurred near them, and their loud and angry voices created a momentary disturbance among the company. Matilda looked up, astonished that any one could be discontented where every thing was so pleasing. The scene, at this moment, represented the Elysian Fields; graceful forms moving through beautiful landscapes, to

which an interposing gauze gave a light shadowy air, represented the companies of the blest; while strains, that might rival those of Paradise, composed their choral harmonies. But she heeded not their charms; her Elysium was in her heart.

Meantime Mrs. Stockwell, who was not in love, and to whom even Strathallan was only the heir of Lord Torrendale, was extremely mortified at his neglect. She was now making efforts to obtain the attention of Mrs. Melbourne, since she was at the head of the favoured party; but it was in vain that she besought that lady to excuse her not knowing her at first; alleged her extreme blindness, "great as the dear Dichess of Albemarle's," which she said, "she hoped would expatiate her fault." To all her advances, Mrs. Melbourne replied by a quiet and cold civility, which was the last thing she understood. Resentful looks, or even smart retort, would have pleased her better, as being what she could comprehend.

Towards the close of the ballet, Sowerby, who for some time had appeared to sit uneasily, proposed to Mrs. Melbourne to go: "this dancing cannot interest you; indeed it cannot please you," said he, looking at Matilda. The young lady immediately rose, and Strathallan begged the honour of attending her; but Stockwell, who thought proper to acknowledge her now as being of his acquaintance, pushed himself forward, saying, "This lady, sir, was of our party before ever you came into the house."

Matilda, who perceived that Sam had mistaken her forbearance, and indifference, for insensibility to his former impertinence, with a glance of contempt, such as her mild countenance hardly ever assumed, turned from him, and gave her hand to Strathallan.

"You shall answer to me for this, sir, in another place and time," said Mr. Stockwell, growing bold as he saw numbers surrounding him.

"Why not now?" replied his lordship,

who perfectly knew his friend Sam. "I have but one objection to employing your time, my dear Stockwell, which is, that while you are bestowing it here so uselessly upon one lady, who, you see, has already got a protector, you are neglecting your own mamma," turning to Mrs. Stockwell, "who would, no doubt, be most grateful and proud of your attentions." The tall martial figure of Strathallan; the good humoured triumph with which he uttered the words, and above all the gay sweetness that smiled in those rich blue eyes, "swimming in youth and love," so contrasted with the discomfited air, and smoked look, of the little powdered beau, that the uneasiness painted in the countenance of Matilda did not repress the envy excited in many, on account of the cause; when suddenly a figure, dressed in deep mourning, advanced between the disputants, and, taking her trembling hand in silence, led her away from both. Stockwell hastily withdrew, scared

at the glance the stranger cast on him as he passed; while Strathallan, giving way, yielded to claims he acknowledged superior—for the intruder was Sir Harold Melbourne.

CHAP. XI.

Demetrio.
Ah! nel tuo volto
Veggo un lampo d'Amor, bella mia face—
Berenice.
Che vuoi da me?—Lasciami in pace.
METASTASIO. *Antigono.*

MATILDA atoned, by hours of the most dreadful anxiety, for the short-lived but exquisite pleasure of those she had passed with Strathallan. The unforeseen re-appearance of Sir Harold Melbourne, whom she believed to be at the Rocks, revived, in their full force, those terrors of which she had experienced a short suspension. As he had not attempted to accompany her home, her fears were as vague as they were terrible. They all turned upon the suspicion of his having followed Strathallan from the opera; and she was convinced, by the agonies the bare idea of his danger excited, how far she was yet from

experiencing for him only that calm friendship, which the nature of his engagements made her consider as a duty. Bitterly did she lament the fatal chance that had first introduced her to the notice of Sir Harold Melbourne. "Unhappy man! blest days," she cried, "when I was ignorant of thy existence! Surely 'twas decreed my peace of mind should not survive the hour that brought me acquainted with a relative, so long unknown; and only known at length for my unhappiness!"

From these reflections, what was her delight to be aroused by the unexpected appearance of Strathallan! It was still early; and he was shewn into the room where Matilda was seated alone; for her mother, who seemed unusually flurried and fatigued with her last night's exertion, had not yet appeared below. He came full of uneasiness and doubts; but the kindling blush of glad surprise, with which she welcomed his approach, put them all to flight, and again, he only lived to love.

He remembered the glance which, on his return to his native home, after the false tidings that he should never return, had first drawn his soul to Matilda. The same look, only that it expressed a more full and delighted thankfulness, now betrayed that all her thoughts had been employed on him.

"Forgive me, dearest Miss Melbourne," he said, advancing towards her, "if I have intruded thus early: what I have to communicate will, I hope, plead my apology. It is on the subject most interesting to my heart; and that is, I hope, not indifferent to yours."

"You can have nothing to say, my lord, that I ought to hear, which might not be told in the presence of others," Matilda replied. "You must be conscious that I can make no alteration in the conduct I have hitherto pursued, while no change in your circumstances justifies such an alteration."

"But if such a change could be hoped—" resumed Strathallan quickly.—

Matilda hesitated—A bright beam of pleasure, for a moment, lit up her countenance.

Strathallan, without waiting her reply, continued, very fast—" I have had a disagreement with Miss Mountain, on a subject in which her pride will not permit her to yield; and on which I have a right to be equally inflexible.—I left her; I will not say in resentment, (for of that, as well as of every other passion, you know the immovable coldness of her disposition renders her incapable) but she was certainly, deeply offended; yet it was a point which neither my own feelings nor my father's would, I am sure, allow us to give up. Not to waste these precious moments on such an unworthy subject, let me rather now hope, that my Matilda will no longer refuse to hear me. I have obeyed all your just but cruel mandates! Three months, amid the wilds of Strathallan, where no human voice intruded to break the sullen stillness around me; where no intelligence from the world was suffered

to reach me, I tried to bring myself back to that frame of mind, which would enable me to fulfil the dreadful duty I had imposed on myself—to return to that cold, joyless calm, which had alone induced me ever to assume such chains. I wrote to no one—I forbade your name to be pronounced—I fondly thought that, if it no longer met my ear, it might in time be banished from my heart.—In vain.—Mixed with the image of a beloved mother, whose memory, amid those sequestered shades where her latter days were past, is still adored, your idea filled the lonely scene, met me in each gloomy walk, and turned the solitude I had sought as a refuge, into an encourager of the fatal passion which preyed upon my peace. I returned to society. It was then I first learnt the reverses which my self-imposed banishment had kept from me. How doubly did I regret those bonds that, in the trying moment of affliction, prevented me from proving my truth! But with no right, no claim—every thought to be devoted to

another, the rules of that cruel delicacy, which you taught me so severely to respect, forbade me to address you, even under the name of friend; and I could only through another, breathe the feelings of a heart, that bled in every vein for your sufferings. To Lady Torrendale, to her, who, with feelings so comparatively calm, possessed the precious privilege I had resigned, I trusted the task of conveying, with all that female tenderness, that delicacy, which might make even you forgive the intrusion, the share I took—— How poor those words!—How does every expression fail in describing the truth! At that fatal moment, that my whole heart and soul were yours, I thought I should rejoice in whatever mitigated your unhappiness.—I heard your marriage with your cousin talked of—I found my mistake, and how far my passion was from bearing the generous character of my Matilda's. Shall I own it, my gentle love? Should not every feeling of this erring heart be exposed to your just but pitying

eye? Resentment mingled with despair. —Though I had consented to yield up my hope in you, my heart I had reserved as yours, and I could not bear you should so soon consent to devote yourself to another. The madness of jealousy, at that moment, fired my breast;—tortures that your pure and gentle bosom can hardly image urged me, by turns, against *his* life, against my own! Returning reason calmed these transports, but it was only to sink me into the torpor of despair. Again I tried to forget you.—In a degree I thought I had succeeded; but the meeting of last night convinced me it was in vain to struggle with my destiny, for that my life was bound up in yours. Listening to that voice—gazing on those enchanting features—I forgot myself—the world —every thing but happiness;—a heaven surrounded you, but with you it vanished. Watching, with strained eyes, till your form disappeared among the crowd, I seemed parted from myself, deprived of more than life; while every rumour that

had robbed me of my small remains of happiness seemed only too fatally confirmed."

Matilda had received from Strathallan proofs of the strongest attachment: yet, well as she thought she knew him, the energy, the nobleness, the generosity of that lofty and impassioned character required, in order to be developed in its fullest extent, to be acted upon by a sentiment, of the excess of which, as it existed in his breast, she found she had still but a faint idea. He would hear of no obstacles; he would endure no repulse. He painted their future happiness in the glowing colours of youth and love: it was impossible to listen to him, and not share for a moment a similar illusion. And was it then possible? Were all her past trials, severe but short, to end in being restored to the object of her wishes, after they had served only as so many tests, to prove his pure and fervent faith? Was her patient endurance to be crowned with bliss like this? Ah, no!—The remembrance of the

vow extorted from her terrors by Sir Harold Melbourne, pressed with a death-cold force upon her heart, and chilled the rising throb of hope that had just began to beat.

"Strathallan," she said, in a solemn voice, "it is in vain you would attempt to obviate every difficulty: I never can be yours."

"I was right then!" he exclaimed, in an altered tone, while the animated flush of pleasure fled from his features; "and Sir Harold—" He looked up in expectation of her answer. Matilda was silent.

"Oh, Matilda, while I was eagerly preparing for our happiness, how could you so hastily, so irrevocably—but I deserve it. Did I not first set you the example, in voluntarily giving up a claim which love in one sweet moment had conceded to me? which nothing—not even your angel eloquence, should have induced me to relinquish. But I threw from me the precious gift, and I would in vain recal it."

He walked up and down, distracted by the painful variety of emotions that crowded in upon him. At length, stopping before her, with a look of mournful tenderness, "and will you indeed, Matilda," he said, "can you at length be his?"

Matilda saw that he was in error, and longed, in order to relieve his heart of part of its load, to explain to him the exact nature of her engagement: but would he then admit it? Would he not rather laugh at the idea of dangers which she shuddered to contemplate, and blame her fears as chimerical, without being able to satisfy her they were ill-founded? Another reason, that may perhaps appear of less importance, yet weighed with a mind, sensible and delicate as hers—she could not find words, although she tried several different forms of expression, in which she could bring herself to convey, to a stranger, the idea of the weakness, the violence, the frenzy, of her unfortunate relative. Unable thus to give Strathallan the satisfac-

tion he required, she again held down her head, and was silent.

"And is it thus we part—and in so short a time too—and must I believe you love him?"

"I did not say I loved him," she replied.

Strathallan started from her in anger; "By heavens I will not bear this; this ambiguous, cruel trifling, in return for the free offer of a heart, devoted, fond, as mine!"

"And I should, perhaps, less hesitate to accept it," exclaimed the distrest Matilda, "if—if—I valued it less.—"

She paused. Her expressions were hardly intelligible; yet still there was enough in them to intoxicate Strathallan with love and joy; again he was all repentance—imploring pardon for the past—the creature of her will.

"Leave me, leave me!" she exclaimed, grieved at the unguarded words that had escaped her; "I am an unhappy creature, and carry the contagion of misery to who-

ever would attach himself to me;—leave me, for your more fortunate bride: for, believe me, fate opposes to our union, a power, imperious as invisible—an influence that I dread to think of—an eye that is ever waking—an arm that is ever stretched out for vengeance!" Overcome with the picture her terror-struck imagination had drawn, it seemed as if she really saw the peril that was only the creation of her fancy: the conflict of the morning, united to the operation of habitual apprehension, was too much for her; her voice grew faint, and she was obliged to seek relief in tears.

"Let me but clasp the charming danger to my bosom," cried the enthusiastic Strathallan, "and I spurn at fear—it cannot harm me!" Alas! he guessed not the nature of that danger, which to contemplate, so shook the bosom of Matilda. To see that beloved being on whom, spite of herself, she doated with such fondness, exposed to the blind transports of frensied jealousy—to behold that

form, on which even now, she gazed, with forbidden but impassioned delight, defaced and sacrificed to his senseless fury; these were the thoughts that, the more he was endeared to her, determined her the more to resist her too fondly trusting lover.

"What have I done to deserve so singular, so cruel a fate?" she said. "Cease, cease, I entreat you, to tempt your own destruction. How wretched I am to be the cause of misery to all I love most on earth!" Hardly conscious of the extent of the confession she had made, the sudden revolution it effected on the too-speaking countenance of Strathallan, alone informed her that it was no longer time to retract or hesitate.

"Enchanting creature!" he exclaimed, gazing on her passionately, "repeat, repeat those delightful words.—Yet you need not repeat them; they have sunk deep within my heart—never by any future coldness to be effaced." It was in vain that Matilda tried to recal what

she had said; to deny that she had given such positive encouragement to his wishes, in the words she had uttered. The brilliant joy that penetrated through every look and word of Strathallan, alone formed the completest contradiction to all she would have said. The restraints of timidity were too feeble, any longer to oppose the expression of happiness like his. Unable further to repress it, he yielded to the sweet violence with which he felt it overflow and inundate his soul, and no more attempted to conceal the delightful conviction with which he was filled, that Matilda loved him. With a gentleness in which she tried, vainly tried, to mingle a degree of severity, she endeavoured to moderate those hopes, to convince him of the necessity of their parting. But Strathallan only saw in these repulses, in this eagerness for his departure, new, flattering, tender testimonies of anxiety and love. Though he forbore to press her on the nature of her apprehensions, he had heard enough to persuade him

they were not of a sort to weigh with him for a moment against his happiness.

"You bid me cease to hope," said he; "but Miss Melbourne must borrow Miss Mountain's eyes, Miss Mountain's voice, before she bids me obey her."

Distressed at transports that she found herself unable to share, the appearance of Mrs. Melbourne was a welcome relief to Matilda; and that lady was charmed in Lord Strathallan, with a display of vivacity, and brilliant animation, that was always in him the more enchanting, as its occurrence was rare. Gradually fascinated by his flow of spirits, though ignorant of the cause, she felt herself flattered by his prompt and early attention; by which he appeared to wish to disavow, in the most pointed manner, the selfish, unfeeling conduct of Lady Torrendale. She found the time pass with peculiar pleasure in his society, while Matilda, as every moment he unfolded some new power of pleasing, more and more bitterly deplored the cruel persecution she en-

dured, from one, who seemed determined to step in between her and every hope; who, when least looked for, was still found hovering around her, ready to cross her path, whenever it appeared that path might lead to happiness.

CHAP. XII.

O entre tes beautés, que ta constance est belle!
C'est ce cœur assuré, ce courage constant
C'est parmi tes vertus, ce que l'on prise tant
Aussi qu'est-il plus beau qu'un amitié fidèle?

BOETHIUS' *Sonnets.*

"ARBELLA has not real beauty, but she'll do." These words, pronounced with an oracular nod, by Lady Torrendale, to the select circle assembled in her dressing-room, had decided the fate of Miss Ferrars. To accomplish this prediction, she slighted her aunt, affronted her cousin, and broke with all her other relations.

"Were I possessed of Miss Ferrars's independent fortune," said Miss Hautenville, "I think I would not consent to be moon to Lady Torrendale." Miss Ferrars was of a different opinion; and preferred being

moon to a more elevated sphere, to being the sun of her own.

Mrs. Stockwell, having declared she found it inconvenient, for "peculiar" reasons, now she knew the Torrendales, to spend her winters in town, Arbella hoped to derive the greatest advantage from that circumstance: but this expectation was far from making her forget her friend; and she was extremely disappointed, not to find her at the house to which she had the direction. Arbella, though a warm friend, was a very bad correspondent; and Matilda, who had a little of the jealous delicacy of the unfortunate, had not written to her since her change of residence. Mr. Stockwell, under pretence of a visit to his mother, had followed Arbella up to town; the only unpleasant circumstance, she declared, attending her journey. How much reason had she to think otherwise, when she discovered, by the accident of her cousin's meeting Matilda at the opera, the friend, respecting whom she had made

so many anxious and vain enquiries? She had staid at home that night on account of a slight indisposition; but was resolved he should make her ample amends for her self-denial.

Had Stockwell foreseen the torments that were preparing for him, he would certainly have wished the trifling sore throat, of which Arbella had complained, changed into a settled hoarseness. Miss Hautenville, as usual, breakfasted in bed, and the family trio did not assemble till a very late hour.

At the breakfast table she began the attack; "Well, Sam, what did you see last night?"

"See!" repeated Sam, who in addition to his natural uncommunicativeness, was now just entering upon the enjoyment of a morning paper, and a mountain of butter'd muffins, from which he did not wish to be disturbed, by the flippant interrogatories of his cousin.

"Ay, see, Mr. Silence: now pray don't think the part of *personnage muet* becomes

you; for I assure you, it never suits but those who can agreeably employ the eyes, if not the ears. So lay down your muffins, put your paper in your pocket, and make the *agréable*, as Lady Torrendale calls it. Now begin, and tell me all you saw at the opera."

"Why, nothing," replied Sam, sulkily.

"Nothing! you saw Vestris surely. How did he dance?"

"Hum—nothing remarkable."

"And Catalani, was she in fine voice?"

"Pretty well, I believe: I did not attend much," said her phlegmatic cousin, who would not, for the world, be suspected of admiring any thing.

Mrs. Stockwell, herself, was shocked: "Oh, sure, Sam, you forget," she said. "She was very great in the bravado, in the first act; and so were Rovedino and Viganoni, in the recitavee."

"And Tramezzani," pursued the pertinacious Arbella, "was he as interesting as ever? what a dear fellow that is! how I doat on Tramezzani!" and then

unmindful of her aunt's reproachful exclamation of "for shame, for shame, niece, to talk so of a stage-player! Did you ever hear me do so?" she continued, "but surely there were some acquaintance of ours in the boxes—who were there?"

"In the first place, there was Lord Strathallan, as was very attentive to us," said Mrs. Stockwell, helping out her son.

"Strathallan!" cried Arbella, eagerly, "now tell me, Sam, how did he look? was he in high beauty?"

"I don't know. I hate that word beauty, as you ladies apply it to a man," answered Stockwell; "he looked as he always looks, I think; a most proud, haughty, disagreeable coxcomb."

"And I hate that word coxcomb," Arbella replied, parodizing her cousin's expression, "as you gentlemen 'of the second table' apply it to all the dear creatures we like. I assure you, you don't follow your own interest, in doing so. *A propos*, Sam; why don't you go to Spain, to get that charming brown, which just

makes us love, instead of envying, Strathallan's beautiful bloom?"

"You are right, miss, to envy any one their bloom; but I can assure you, I envy nothing of Lord Strathallan's."

"Not his eyes? Oh, you certainly must allow, you envy his eyes. I wish I had them here, then would I give them to you, dear Sam, to go a wooing with." Stockwell's countenance grew blanker and blanker, and Arbella hummed *Begli astri d'amor*; but recollecting this was not the way to obtain the information she desired, she suddenly extended her hand to her cousin, exclaiming, with a smile, "Come, come, do be pleased, and look pretty, and here am I, all attention to your account of the opera; to begin like the news-papers, 'Among the persons of distinction, we noticed—' Well, go on."

"Why, there was the Duchess of Normandby, and the Duchess of Albemarle, and the Prince of E—, and the Duke of O—, and the Cossack, and the Spanish ambassador, and G— the great poet,

and N— the great traveller, and C— the quack doctor; and there were some pretty women, Miss De Courcy, and Miss Mordaunt, and Miss Melbourne,—"

"Miss Melbourne!—Matilda Melbourne!" exclaimed Arbella, "Fool! idiot! blockhead! why didn't you tell me that the first thing? Where does she live now?" And she had scarcely obtained the desired information, when starting up, heedless of a story just begun by her aunt, with "when I were with the Dichess of Albemarle," and letting fall her cup of tea upon Sam's leg, which forced from him an exclamation, any thing but lover-like, she hastily threw on a shawl which lay beside her, and, without hat, bonnet, or any other covering for her head but a veil, darted down stairs, and, unattended even by a servant, was hastening to the street-door, when Mrs. Stockwell bawled out from the top of the stairs, "Niece, niece! where are you flying away at such a rate? Did you ever see me do so? In your state of health, and against my express conjunctions——"

"Oh, ma'am, I'm quite well now," cried Arbella, who had got to the street-door.

"Well then, if you are quite well, you can hear me."

"No, ma'am, I'm sick."

"But niece—"

"For God's sake, ma'am, don't keep me talking; I'm sick, I'm hoarse, I'm deaf, I'm dumb, I'm speechless!" screamed Arbella; and running out of the house without waiting for an answer, she soon reached the abode of her friend, from which she was only separated by a few streets; and was received by Matilda with the kindest and tenderest welcome.

So many events of a pleasing and unpleasing nature had occurred, since last they met, that it was impossible, by words, to give utterance to the various emotions excited by the present renewal of their friendship: tears were the only language which, for a few moments, expressed their feelings, on both sides; and Matilda experienced sincere consolation, while

weeping on the bosom of her tried and affectionate friend. She did not, however, allow the pleasure this meeting afforded her to make her forget to thank Arbella for her kind and generous conduct; from the pecuniary part of the obligation, she said, she had now a prospect of soon relieving herself.

"Talk not to me of payment," cried the vehement Arbella; "you outrage my feelings; can I ever repay you for saving me from an imprudence? Oh, what an egregious fool was I going to make of myself then, and might again to-morrow, had I not little Prudence in London, at my elbow: surely, dear Matilda, we are quit, or rather I am everlastingly your debtor. But why did you hide yourself from us? I lost not a moment in going to the house indicated in your old direction, but you were not there; and it was only by the merest chance that booby,—oaf,—I beg ten thousand pardons, I mean that excessively elegant young man my cousin, overheard you mention where you lived, last night,

to Lord Strathallan, and retained it in his —oh, lud! I shall never get out—his head—without another epithet, and that won't be right you know, since he is my relation—and since he mentioned he saw you—and since he told me where you were to be found, and since, as good Mrs. Hill says in the 'Limerick Gloves;' so tell me, my dear, the history of your removal, to put me in good humour."

Arbella was in the most brilliant flow of spirits, which was always the manner in which her affectionate joy demonstrated itself, after the first emotions were subsided; and she had hardly patience to listen to the account which she had herself requested, and which Matilda thought due to her sincere friendship; omitting, of course, the particular interest which her charms had excited in the hearts of her cousin and Mr. Sowerby.

She had scarcely heard her out, when, to Matilda's great surprise, she exclaimed, "So, it is all settled, is it not? and you are to be transported into Mr. Sowerby's

museum; the rarest treasure in the whole collection. I think I see the old virtuoso throwing you a seal's skin and a piece of coral as a wedding gift, like the rich lover of Ajut in the Greenland Tale; no, that was a kettle and a piece of coral, I believe. Well, it's all the same. Come, tell me truly, are not the dresses fixed on? A pair of Brazilian humming-birds for ear-rings, and gloves of the silk of the Pinna Marina? I assure you, I shall expect a pair. The writings are of course drawn up on a leaf of the papyrus. How I long to be of the wedding party! Instead of dull cake and wine, we shall have, at the head, a dish of the Chinese bird's-nest soup; the bread-tree shall supply our only loaf, while your rosy lip shall sip nectar from the American lotus horn. The harp-shell must be put into requisition to sound your nuptial song. The common lyre would do for an idle thing like me; but we must have the noble harp to strike your praises, my charming Bragela!"

Matilda, scarcely able to interrupt her

friend's volubility, took the first opportunity to assure her, with a blush, that she was quite mistaken.

"No?" cried Arbella, with a look of interrogative incredulity. "Then perhaps it is Sir Harold after all? In the wrong box again, as aunt Stockwell would say. Is it then indeed to be the adorable —— Really, my dear, with your three lovers, Sowerby the worthy—Strathallan the resistless—and Sir Harold the flighty, you put me in mind of the princess in the French fairy tale, who was courted at once by as many suitors: of whom the first was Un Prince comme il faut; the second, Un Prince comme il n'y en a point; and the third, Un Prince comme il vaudrait mieux qu'il n'y en eut point."

"My *three* lovers!" repeated Matilda, with a look of unfeigned astonishment.

"Perhaps, my dear, you do not know that Sir Harold, like the melancholy Jaques, or mad Malvolio, muses by the babbling brook, or carves in fantastic love-knots Matilda's name on every beech-

tree at the Rocks. Then he tells every one that will listen to him that he has you fast by bonds that 'not death shall sever;' but as the knight is rather moon-struck, we were inclined to believe he dreamt; at least such was the opinion at the Residence, who in general gave you to Mr. Sowerby."

"I did not think," resumed Matilda, endeavouring to conceal, under an appearance of careless indifference, the agitation into which this new proof of her cousin's determined persecution threw her, "that my affairs were of sufficient consequence to arrest your attention, among the various occupations and amusements Woodlands used to afford."

"Occupations, my dear! what is so delightful an occupation as the affairs of others, to 'diligent Miss Hautenville and painful Miss Langrish?' as they would certainly be called by worthy Old Fuller, or some of those queer long leathern-coated gentry, that take the dust at the bottom shelf of Lord Torrendale's library.

The trouble those poor ladies give themselves, to ascertain that you have charmed half the world, is not to be told; and what makes it the greater pity, is, that success, which is the reward of other discoverers, only makes their hearts overflow with the bitterness of envy and regret. But let us not waste a thought on them. I am distracted when I think of the time I have wasted, and the hours I might have spent with you. I regret every day, every hour, I passed without your company. Why did I not guess you were here! Why did I not go to the Opera, where I should have met you last night? I might have gone to the Opera—but really" she almost blushed as she spoke, "just as I was thinking of going, the idea arose to my mind's eye of Sam—his face, and his opera-hat, even as he last attended me—sitting next me, leaning forward, just so—brows knit—munching the end of a stick—'for ever silent, and for ever sad.' I could not stand it, and by giving way to that horrible fancy, I lost

the greatest pleasure. How could I guess Matilda would be there! but I ought to have guessed it, for I have often observed, that when from caprice or any other cause, we refuse to comply with some trifling wish of our friends, or, without necessity, make some alteration in our usual arrangements, we find it productive of unforeseen inconvenience or disappointment, which had not entered into our calculation, when we yielded to the whim of the moment."

"But you have not always the phantom of Mr. Stockwell and your aunt," said Matilda, unable to resist a smile at her friend's ludicrous distresses. "You have sometimes Lady Torrendale for a chaperon."

"True, my dear, and I was just going to tell you that the great step is taken; I have made my debut. Appeared with her at one or two grand assemblies, and even endured the buzz at the Opera, and the whispers that ran round the box circle of 'Who is she? What is she? She's

not one of us! Yet she's with Lady Torrendale.' 'She is a rich Jewess!' 'No, she's the daughter of a Christian stockbroker.' 'Of a Derbyshire squire.' 'An Irish beauty from the castle, come to make her first winter campaign in London.' 'No—no beauty—that's the only thing that's positive.' How my heart beat when the eye-glasses were first put up; and the stare, and the sneer, and the lounge, were mingled with a few glances of—admiration shall I call them—in the region of fop-alley. But, on the whole, though she took me twice last week, I have not had the satisfaction I expected on going into public with her ladyship; for, in the first place, she is too much taken up with self, and given to flirting, which is abominable in an old woman; and in the next, she is not a good *nomenclator*. Now I see by your face you, as usual, do not understand me; I will try to explain my meaning more fully. I go to the Opera, anxious to see all the lions; more desirous of knowing the fine people, than the

business of the stage. A little ugly jew-looking old man enters her box for a few moments; I mechanically turn my eyes away, as I always do, by a sort of instinct, from any object not particularly agreeable. When he has left us, she says, that was the famous Portuguese Conde, whom you said you wished to see so much; Don Manuel Ordognez Felipe, Herrera, D'Aveiro, y Cunha, y Torres, Vicentios y Souza. Or perhaps a strange looking woman, fantastically dressed, stays half an act with her, chatters some nonsense, and departs. As soon as the door is shut, she turns round to me and says, 'that was the great Mademoiselle R——, the celebrated foreigner whom all the world is running after.' Then I say 'dear! why did not your ladyship whisper me that before they came in? I would have looked more at them.' She replies, with that delightful toss of the head, which you must remember, 'Lord, I thought every body knew them!' Then, in the coffee-room, I look about in hopes

of seeing some distinguished orator, or great military character, that is the talk of the day. Driving home with her I lament my disappointment. Surely, she replies, you must have observed that gentleman in a plain brown coat, who bowed to me as we entered the room; he was standing with several others, who were all talking to me, that was Lord ——. And if by all these most distinguishing marks I do not immediately acknowledge him, she adds, 'Really I cannot help it, Arbella, if your acquaintance with remarkable people is not so extensive as your excursive imagination leads you to wish it to be.' You know her dear deliberate way of saying an obliging thing; though I really believe, knowing my *tic* for celebrated men, she did it once or twice purposely to vex me, in return for a terrible mistake I made the first night I went with her. I thought I could not keep too near her, to avoid falling into any impropriety, and kept my place next to her the whole evening. She was cross

to me all the way home, and was talking at me, I could perceive, in her good-natured manner, about the insipidity of girls—the insufferableness of misses—and the hateful stupidity of a female party. At length I happened, unfortunately, to observe, I wondered Lord Kilcare did not break in upon ours, for I saw him opposite to us all night. Then burst the smothered flame. 'How could he,' she exclaimed, 'when he saw his place was occupied?' I directly perceived the famous blunder I had made, and that I had been tormenting her all night without knowing it. So next time we went with our usual ladies, Miss Mountain, and Mrs. Murray, and Sappho, who has come up to learn taste; I was resolved the countess should not accuse me of keeping too near her, and sat quite in a corner at the back of the box, talking to that very Lord Kilcare all night. She often turned round and told me there was room in front, but I obstinately kept my post.

"Returning to my aunt's, she told me

it was very odd I chose to interrupt the performance with my incessant noise, and 'vulgar country giggle,' instead of staying by some of the ladies of my party. 'Lord, madam,' said I, 'I thought you did not like me to take up those seats; I left that place for Lord Kilcare.' She looked confoundedly vexed; but what could I do more? the man had his choice, and if he could not bear the glare of the lights, it was not my fault, was it?"

"So, Miss Mountain is as much as ever with Lady Torrendale?"

"Yes; why should that surprise you? Oh, then you have heard of the hitch there—oh, that will be easily got over. It all originated in that fertile source of pride and dissension, Miss Mountain's estates 'on the maternal side.' Now, as she was to enrich Strathallan's impoverished revenues with those estates, she thought it but fair Strathallan should, in return, assume the name and arms of the family of Bishop or Dean, or whatever it is that was her mother's maiden name. But

the gentleman was unpersuadable; having no fancy for the church, I suppose, he would neither be Dean nor Bishop; and as pride is never so well awake, as when love is fast, quite fast, asleep, not all the estates in Derbyshire, or out of it, could tempt him to take that little name instead of his own. No, no, 'the blood of the Fitzroys was up in him,' as Major O'Hara would say."

"Major O'Hara! that is a gentleman mentioned in a letter of Lady Torrendale's," said Matilda, endeavouring to conceal, under an appearance of curiosity respecting a new subject, the interest she took in Arbella's last piece of information. "I understand he also pretends to ——"

"Oh, yes, my dear, pretends to be very fond of me; it's a long story, and I must defer it to another visit," resumed Miss Ferrars, who, if the truth must be acknowledged, felt some confusion in speaking of another lover, after her violent professions of eternal constancy to Spencer. "I must go," she continued;

her hurry increasing in exact proportion as she found herself at a loss for an answer. "Bless me!" (running to the window) "I protest there are Lady Torrendale's liveries. She'll be up stairs in a minute. I know you have been very ill-behaved, my lady," she continued, in a half aside, "and I won't stay to help you out. She will be con—— *very vexed*, as George Spring calls it, at not finding your mother at home; but she deserves it. Now, bless you, my love, and tell me when you will call; for I want to talk to you about Major O'Hara, and to tell you of Fitzroy's behaviour, and half a hundred more. And for Heaven's sake don't be so flurried when any of that family are named; and don't sit there, looking like the man in the story, who was obliged to eat with a drawn sword suspended over his head. There, now I see I have said something wrong again," she continued, observing the visible emotion which these last words, that so unexpectedly and forcibly conjured up the most painful cir-

cumstance of her life, excited in her hearer. "Yet how I have done so this time, I confess, I am perfectly at a loss to conceive."

"And you will ever be so—kind, well-intentioned, inconsiderate Arbella," Matilda inwardly murmured, as her friend, unconscious of the deep pang she had inflicted, lightly tripped away. "Of all the aggravations to my sad singular fate, is there any more dreadful than that it is incommunicable?"

The absence of Mrs. Melbourne, who had gone out shortly after the departure of Strathallan, rendered it necessary that Matilda should receive Lady Torrendale. It was a circumstance on which the countess congratulated herself, as she dreaded the scrutinizing eye of her former friend. Her ladyship was accompanied by Miss Mountain, two or three inches taller than usual, by the approaching honour of being a viscountess. Lady Torrendale was in a real or affected flutter of spirits, and went up to Miss Melbourne with ap-

parent kindness. "I have been expecting to see you, my dear girl," she said; "why did you never come near us?"

"If I had known—" said Matilda, hesitating, but with dignity. "If your ladyship had sent—had written a line to let us know that . . . . ."

Lady Torrendale endeavoured to cover her own confusion, by addressing her young friend with some questions about her mother; muttered some unmeaning regrets, and assurances of regard, and then added in the same breath, "I am very unfortunate never to find her at home." Miss Melbourne repressed a smile. The countess, only ashamed of having *appeared* ashamed of herself, and vexed to have betrayed, before this little rustic of the Rocks, an embarrassment and want of presence of mind, not uncommon in those who are conscious of having acted ill, (whatever may be their usual politeness, self-possession, or knowledge of the world) now turned to Julia Melbourne, fell into ecstacies upon her beauty; and

judiciously praised, to the child herself; the touching air of sensibility with which it was accompanied; forgetting that it owed to its artless and natural expression its greatest charm; and that if sensibility in early life was interesting, a look and character of assumed sentiment was the most revolting thing to be found at that age, where every emotion is expected to bear the stamp of simplicity and truth.

"'Tis a delicate tiny thing," said Miss Mountain in her solemn voice, as she raised her up a little, to be able to contemplate her more at ease. "Her mother did not long survive her birth, I believe. Tell me, my dear, can you remember your mother?" Then staring most distressingly at the little timid girl, she asked her formally "if she was not reckoned very like the late Lady Julia Melbourne?"

The entrance of the lady of the house was welcomed by the terrified Julia, as the signal for a most grateful release. Not so Lady Torrendale; she felt no joy

at the approach of Mrs. Melbourne, and her little remaining fund of confidence was chilled and dispersed by the look of mingled coldness and surprise, with which Mrs. Melbourne greeted her approach. Her beauty, once so perfect, had been always of a nobler style than that of the countess; and though several years older than her ladyship, the retired life she had led, had preserved it in far greater perfection. The matron-like simplicity of her dress, which announced her widowed state, added to the majesty of her figure and deportment; and the quick glance of that eagle eye, which always looked as if it would pierce the gazer's soul, might well strike awe into a mind accustomed, amid all the assumed airs of wealth and consequence, to look up to hers with a secret acknowledgment of inferiority.

After the first compliments were past, Lady Torrendale tried to rally her spirits; but every look and motion was so constrained, her visit appeared so evidently to be in consequence of the suggestions

and wishes of another, that she failed in either feeling, or inspiring, the ease she seemed anxious to restore. How to resume the conversation seemed the difficulty. Expressions of sympathy—condolences for the past—self-gratulations for her present good fortune—seemed likely to be all equally ill-received. A cold silence ensued; at length the countess, recovering a degree of courage, talked with rapidity of her numerous engagements, lamented the daily demands made upon her time, and concluded, turning to Mrs. Melbourne, "I assure you, I should not have stood upon ceremony, but should have immediately done myself the pleasure of waiting on friends I so much valued, if —— I had had your last direction." This excuse her ladyship thought an ingenious one; and she uttered it with that sort of confident smile and nod, which shewed she expected no reply.

Mrs. Melbourne drily observed that it was three weeks since they had been settled in their abode; now Lady Torren-

dale had their address for their former one, and had been in town exactly six. This circumstance, which she perceived had not escaped the penetration of Mrs. Melbourne, made her feel the full force of that apparently simple remark. Unable any longer to conceal her uneasiness, she looked first at Miss Mountain, then at the floor, caressed her little dog, and at length, spite of her usual volubility and boldness, pronounced only an unintelligible and lengthened " Oh!—ho!"

Miss Mountain, seeing her noble friend thus overset, conceived herself bound to support her; and calling to her aid the French phrases, which she so ingeniously contrived not to mis-pronounce, but to misapply, began by remarking that they had certainly been misinformed; for that the countess had been told Mrs. Melbourne had left her former lodgings before she herself arrived in town, though she could not learn to what part of London she had removed. The stately lady continued to declare " she could not guess the

reason of the deceit, but that people in general were *bien imposans;* and to regret that by it she had been *déterrée* from making her purposed visit. We had no time to enquire into it," she added. "Pleasure, you are aware, Mrs. Melbourne, has its martyrs and its slaves, as well as business; and our chains are not perhaps the more pleasing for being made of gold. Be that as it may, on one's first appearance among them, after any thing of an absence, one's friends are very apt to interrupt and hinder what one most wishes to do, by a perpetual succession of offered amusement. Indeed such people are *très prévenans.*"

If Lady Torrendale was silent during this haraugue of her companion's, it was in utter astonishment at the superior boldness she displayed: for the peeress (who had persuaded herself that her visit would be received with gratitude, at whatever time, and in whatever manner it might be paid,) was completely disconcerted by the dignified coldness of the

elder lady, and the graceful but almost timid reserve, expressed in the countenance of the younger. She looked at her watch—caressed Julia anew—wisely told her she was a little beauty, and would always continue one, if she would "look thus, and hold her head just so," then after a little more common-place chat, reminded Miss Mountain of some engagement, that made it impossible for them to prolong their stay. The young lady rose, again praised the little Julia in flowery phrase, and promised the next time she called to bring her some French toys, which were of a new invention, and *très ingénu*. Then, as she made her formal parting courtesy to Mrs. Melbourne, she apologised for the length of time her visit had been deferred, but added, with a gracious smile, "*Je suis sûre que vous n'êtes pas effrontée.*"

Scarcely had this well matched pair taken their departure, when Mrs. Melbourne yielded to the inclination to laugh which she had scarcely been able to repress in their presence. "*Voilà le monde!*

Matilda," said she. "Who would have believed that this lady, who seems to have thought it almost impossible for the sagacity of a Bow-street officer to trace my impervious haunts, was the identical Lady Torrendale, who used to hang upon my words, and affect an admiration, as little deserved as her present neglect. Long, long ago, I knew her. Lady Torrendale is all outside. Those fascinating manners, that at first, more or less, deceive and prepossess persons of every age, (but which should be only the approach to that superior excellence, of which the mind is the proper temple,) form the whole of her character: or, if there be any thing beyond it, the building, unfurnished, dark and narrow, ill corresponds with the splendid portico that leads to it."

Matilda was not disposed thus calmly to moralize. Mrs. Melbourne only saw in the countess a trifling fine lady, alike unworthy of resentment or regard. Her daughter, though their minds had, perhaps, never been in unison, remembered

Lady Torrendale in scenes of interest, in moments of tenderness, and mutually shared regret; remembered her, endeared by sorrow, beloved for the services, which, on more than one trying occasion, she had been able to render her: and that it should leave no trace behind! Yet, though it was evident, from her recent conduct, that Lady Torrendale did not experience the slightest wish to soften or participate in the afflictions of her former friends; it would be doing her injustice to believe her capable of intending deliberately to insult them with the insolence of prosperity. No—selfish in all her feelings, the first news of the reverse they had sustained, had been received by her with that mixture of indifference and disgust, which the bare idea of misfortune inspires in minds of a certain class. But she might, perhaps, have still continued a portion of her friendship towards them, had not reasons interfered which shall appear hereafter.

To drive away the unpleasant ideas which

Lady Torrendale's visit had excited, Mrs. Melbourne turned the conversation to the other occurrences of the morning. "You see you alarmed yourself needlessly about Sir Harold," she said; "Strathallan heard nothing of him, and all, as yet, is safe."

"All, *as yet*, is safe!" Matilda repeated, with a deep, convulsive, long-drawn sigh.

"I have great hopes of our eccentric baronet," resumed Mrs. Melbourne. "His numerous attentions to you—the solid proofs of friendship we have received—"

"Oh, my mother," interrupted Matilda, misunderstanding her. "Would you sacrifice your child?"

"How the mention of that unhappy man alarms you!" said Mrs. Melbourne, looking at her with compassion. "I only meant to say that I should never have accepted his benefits, but in the hope, that in the opportunities afforded by more frequent intercourse, I might seize one in which he would consent to release you."

What was Sir Harold's motive for appearing, and whether he would not soon appear again, could not, from the irregularity of his habits, and general flightiness of his conduct, be with any degree of certainty ascertained; and Mrs. Melbourne contrived gradually to draw off her daughter's attention from fruitless and painful speculations, by the art she so eminently possessed, of turning the mind of those, with whom she conversed, towards the most pleasing topics their situation could suggest. The brilliant vivacity which had distinguished her in early life, was tempered, not destroyed, by time, and now shewed itself in the spirit and cheerfulness, with which, after the first shock of misfortune was past, she bore up against the minor miseries attendant in its train. Without any unbecoming pride, a consciousness of innate and superior worth contributed to the equanimity of her temper. She looked on the world with the feelings of a woman, but the discrimination of an elevated mind; and, while she

pointed out with humour, devoid of asperity, its contradictions and follies to her daughter's notice, the poignancy of her wit was ever chastened by that bland and winning softness, which in brighter days had made Aspasia Villiers alike the solace of the statesman, and the soother of the student; even the care-harassed Matilda, before she retired to rest, learnt to repeat, with a great deal of self-taught resignation, and a little of her mother's gay philosophy, "*voilà le monde!*"

CHAP. XIII.

"Love was given us by the author of our being, as the reward of virtue, and the solace of care: but the base and sordid forms of artificial (which I oppose to natural) society, in which we live, have encircled that heavenly rose with so many thorns, that the wealthy alone can gather it with prudence."

SIR WILLIAM JONES.

STRATHALLAN was true to the promise he had given Matilda, to pursue to the utmost, the interest he felt persuaded he possessed in her heart. With her he had for the first time tasted the sweet satisfaction of inspiring a passion, in which he was himself alone the object; and the singular ingenuousness and openness of her character, was ever preparing for him a succession of new and delicate enjoyments, which he well knew how to appreciate. Still Matilda, supported and en-

couraged by Mrs. Melbourne, persisted in her positive rejection of his suit. "He believes it would ensure his happiness—he believes he could win over his family to his way of thinking," she said. "But if once you yielded, reason would soon tear away the veil, that passion now draws over every other interest. 'Tis your high duty, my Matilda, to be the guardian over those interests, which he now despises and neglects; and the more he shews himself incapable of weighing them with your attractions, the more you should steadily refuse the sacrifice proposed by this generous young man."

An ensuing short interview with Lady Torrendale, confirmed Matilda in her opinion of the justness of her mother's conclusion. Nothing could exceed her coldness when they returned her visit. Mrs. Melbourne was in no hurry to perform this necessary duty; observing that as she always made it a rule to return civilities exactly in the manner she received them, that call "might keep cool." On

arriving at Fitzroy-square, the sight of a very elegant landaulet at the door announced there were visitors within; they found her ladyship, who seemed hardly to have done breakfast, though it was past two o'clock, in very animated and apparently interesting conversation with her intimate friend, Mrs. Murray, the lady of the landaulet, who was of course entitled to twice the attention her other visitors could claim. The countess slightly noticed her once "charming Matilda" with a muttered inquiry, and a languid bend of the head; and paid a little more attention to Mrs. Melbourne, whom she could never see without a slight degree of confusion, but did not introduce either of them to her friend. She rang for more chocolate, and though they assured her they had long breakfasted, and refused to touch any thing, continued to press it upon both the ladies; seeming to think that she thus excused herself from taking any other trouble to entertain them. Mrs. Murray stared at both;

seemed rather displeased at the intrusion—then, with Miss Melbourne's appearance; then turned towards the elder lady, in whom she seemed to hope to find plainness more consoling; she was soon, however, glad to take refuge in the less assured looks of the innocent and unassuming Matilda; and lastly, turning to Lady Torrendale, resumed the conversation, which this slight interruption seemed only to have rendered more interesting. "So his whole fortune is to go to his niece, Miss Luttridge."

"No, my dear creature, I told you it was Miss Luttrell."

"I assure you Luttridge is the name."

"Don't you mean the lady in green that we saw at the opera the other night?"

"Well! that was Miss Luttridge."

"Luttrell you mean?"

"Miss Melbourne, I wish you would take another cup of chocolate—another!—I mean I wish you would—Depend upon it Luttrell is the name."

During the continuance of this unin-

telligible dispute, in which the names of Luttrell and Luttridge were sent backward and forward with the velocity of a game of shuttlecock, at least a hundred times, Lady Torrendale seemed almost unable to remark that there were any other persons in the room: at length, having settled that important matter to her satisfaction, she turned to Mrs. Melbourne, and had actually begun some very polite and tender enquiries, when the entrance of another visitor, who seemed to have *les entrées libres* to her ladyship's morning levée, caused a new and a more serious interruption—a young man of very fashionable appearance, whose boots, whip, and general air and dress, at once announced him to be one of the heroes of Bond-street, abruptly approached the countess, and accosted her familiarly with "Lady Torrendale, you remember my little dog Gip?"

"I cannot say I do," replied her ladyship, turning from her half-finished enquiry, and replying with a complacency

which shewed the new comer was a person of importance in her eyes—"I shall, however, be very happy to hear of any thing that concerns him."

"I have cut off both his ears, and his tail."

"Both his ears and his tail! Poor little thing!" repeated Lady Torrendale, looking from Mrs. Melbourne to Mrs. Murray for an answering glance of sympathy.

"Are you not afraid, Lord Kilcare," she continued, in a plaintive tone of voice, "that in this cold weather he will suffer by it?"

"Suffer by it! no—what should he suffer? it will do him a great deal of good. Mrs. Murray, I wish you would let me cut your dog's ears for you."

"My dog's! Heaven defend me from such barbarity!"

"And I return thanks every day," resumed Lady Torrendale, with a look of becoming piety, "that my poor dear little Floss is a spaniel, so that it cannot be even proposed to me—for I cannot bear

to give pain to any living creature!" and her eye, carelessly wandering over Matilda, rested upon the lap-dog.

"Only yesterday," added Mrs. Murray, "Lady Dareall was walking with her little Flora in the park—little Flora has had her ears recently cut, and they began to bleed again—it was a shocking sight."

"Oh, but I have an infallible styptic to prevent dogs' ears from bleeding," resumed my lord.

"And I can tell you that dogs' ears—" continued Lady Torrendale eagerly.

"Come Matilda, my love," said Mrs. Melbourne, "I think we are outstaying our appointment."

"My dear Mrs. Melbourne, you must not think of running away from us so soon," cried the countess, hastily rising to stop her, "you are always in such a hurry—I had a thousand things to say to you."

"And I will hear them with great pleasure, dear madam, another time."

"Well—if you must go, you must; but I am really—very—I am sure I am quite——"

"Good morning, good morning—indeed you must excuse us, but I am afraid we shall be late," interrupted Mrs. Melbourne, as with an air of perfect good humour and self-possession she hurried away, leaving her ladyship in the middle of a speech, which she had begun without carefully considering what should be the conclusion of it; while Matilda, as the transient glow of indignation flushed her cheek, could not forbear inwardly exclaiming, "Cruel, cruel world! why do thy rules condemn me thus to seek the most selfish, and to avoid the most generous of human beings?"

Of the necessity of avoiding that amiable being, if she wished for tranquillity, Matilda became every day more and more convinced. When she found he would not give up the pursuit, she thought it most prudent to have herself denied to

him; but she could not avoid sometimes meeting him abroad; and whenever it was possible, he renewed the subject most interesting to both their hearts, though banished from her lips. He seemed, by a sort of intuition, to be acquainted with every spot she was most likely to frequent. A morning walk with Julia in the park, a ramble towards the fields in quest of fresher air, or an unambitious turn amidst the dusted shrubs and tamer vegetation of the adjoining square, were equally sure to be intercepted by this watchful and persevering lover; who, with respectful attention that Mrs. Melbourne could not bring herself to repel, and tenderness of address that it was most dangerous for Matilda to admit, joined their party: too happy, if in the course of a lengthened walk he had an opportunity of whispering two words expressive of his unchanged devotion to Matilda.

The appearance of the ladies beyond the precincts of their own house and garden, became more and more rare; but the

conduct of Lord Strathallan remained unaltered.

Suddenly, and without the least apparent reason for such a change, the behaviour of Lady Torrendale became as pointedly attentive, as it had been haughty and neglectful. Heedless of the coldness with which her civilities were received, she continued to overwhelm Mrs. and Miss Melbourne with offers of kindness and politeness. Tickets for every place of public amusement to which they might possibly wish to go, crowded in upon them every morning; and visits or enquiries from her ladyship were equally frequent.

They could not avoid being sometimes with her in return; but to her evening parties they steadily refused to go, fearing that at them they might risk meeting Strathallan.

"What can be her ladyship's motives for this wonderful reformation," Mrs. Melbourne observed, "is more than we can divine—all that we may be certain of, my child, is that it is for no good."

There was one invitation, however, that Lady Torrendale would not hear of Matilda's refusing. This was to grace her young friend Emily's birth-day, of thirteen, with her presence, at a little ball given on the occasion.

"We have included all under the head of dancers from eight to eighteen," observed the countess, "purposely to take in both you and Julia. She is not more than eight, is she?"

The idea of Julia's gratification determined Miss Melbourne; and the gratitude that was expressed by the whole party at Torrendale house, made her feel pleased with herself for this prompt compliance with the wishes of her friend. For the first hour, she observed nothing that should make her alter her sentiments. The room that had been set apart for the little dancers was chalked and adorned with festoons of flowers, in a simple but elegant taste.

Notwithstanding the latitude that was given, few exceeded the bounds of childhood; and the unmingled joy that dif-

fused itself over their lively and happy countenances, while engaged in the amusement, seemed to communicate itself, by a correspondent sympathy, to the other guests. Among these Matilda was surprised to meet Arbella. When her friend gaily rallied her on the infringement of a vow she had once playfully made, "That she would never go to a ball without a beau, or a party without a peeress—"

"True, true, my dear," she replied, "I thought I had renounced all such insipid affairs——'Pray, Miss Jane, take Master John, because he cannot do right hand and left, poor little dear!—But Miss Anna, as you are the tallest in the room, you shall have that little soul in petticoats; and above all things take care you do not run over Lord Skip and his partner'——but—all I can say is, I have an aunt and a cousin at home."

"What an advantage I have over you," said Matilda, "in the pleasure these

scenes always give me. I cannot help fancying I share the joy of my poor favourite Edwin, when in vision admitted to the fairy revels—*

'The little warriors doff the targe and spear,
'And loud enlivening strains provoke the dance.
'They meet, they dart away, they wheel askance;
'To right, to left, they thrid the flying maze.'

I almost expect those well-traced flowers and circles to assume a brighter and more emerald glow where marked by their light tread."

"Why, certainly, they can perform the figures with perhaps still more grace and perfection than we, who are 'obliged' to flirt up a whole dance, and who have our attention distracted by having to mind whom we choose to dance with, and whom we choose to 'stand next.' And, after all, I do not know but the lightness and smallness of those little delicate creatures, is best calculated for an amusement, sportive and playful in its essence; that it

* Beattie's Minstrel.

both satisfies the eye of the spectator, and pleases those engaged in it, better than——"

"Pleases! They seem indeed completely, and without one drawback, pleased and happy—pleasure, pure, perfect and unalloyed, the only pleasure that deserves the name," continued the enthusiastic Matilda, while a tear unbidden started into her eye, "seems to dance in the gay bosom of those little innocent creatures!—happy season! how painful to think it cannot be prolonged."

"But one would not like to remain a puppet all one's life, without a heart or a soul, though perhaps it would be very convenient," Arbella continued, while the comparison that she made of the present amusement, with some entertainment of a different kind, seemed to strike her with painful recollection—"but then when you envy these little souls, you must consider, *mon ange*—

'If few their wants, their pleasures are but few.'

You look surprised; perhaps you do not follow the march of my ideas—So to change their course, we will, if you please, march into one of the adjoining rooms, to see what these good people have prepared for us; for when there is nothing else to be had, my veneration for cakes and custards always rises proportionably."

After passing through one or two apartments, in which refreshments were served, Arbella led her friend on to a sort of vestibule; but Matilda started back as soon as she had opened the door—"Why don't you come on, love? Is it that gentleman who frightens you?"

Standing alone, and in apparently deep contemplation of a picture, she beheld Strathallan. He turned towards them with unaffected ease, though the joy that overflowed his heart treacherously betrayed itself in his eyes, at the appearance of Miss Melbourne.

"That is Lady Torrendale's picture,"

said he, "just finished—by Lawrence—Do not you think it does great justice to the original!"

"And so, my young man, you have been staying in the waiting-room, falling in love with 'my grandmother's picture:' you will easily make me believe that," whispered Arbella, in a murmured half-aside.

"It is an age since I have seen you, Miss Ferrars," continued Strathallan, turning to her with a smile, "you must favour me with a little of your reviving conversation. I long to have another battle with you;" and drawing Matilda's arm within his, and giving the other to her friend, the trio took, in that manner, several turns up and down the elegantly decorated apartments, during which Strathallan addressed the greater part of his discourse to Arbella, reserving nothing but the more dangerous language of his eyes for Matilda.

"This grows intolerable," thought Arbella, who was too practised a coquette not

to perceive what was going on before her. "Matilda, my dear, it is very hot—it is very cold; there is a draught of air in this room—I want my aunt—lord, what am I thinking of? I mean my shawl—Do, do, let us return to the ball-room."

"Do not return this moment," Strathallan whispered Miss Melbourne, in a low, persuasive tone. But Matilda followed Arbella's lead, and Strathallan entered the room with them. Matilda moved towards Lady Torrendale, and a party, who were assembled round the fire.

"I was sure, my dear," Arbella whispered, "you wanted to get rid of him, but did not know how to do it;" and satisfied with her skilful manœuvring, she proceeded to engage the attention of Strathallan herself; but he seemed wholly taken up with the little interesting Julia. Arbella would play with a child as she would play with a lap-dog, to shew off her vivacity or good nature; but both objects were, in reality, equally uninteresting to her; and if one of those infan-

tine competitors, for a moment, took off the attention which she imagined always to be her due, her indifference changed into absolute dislike and resentment.

"Now come, come away, do, that's a good creature!" she cried, dragging Julia away, rather abruptly, from Lord Strathallan; "there's a lottery of toys in the next room; and there will not be a single ticket left for you, Julia, if you do not make haste." There were, however, tickets sufficient for Arbella and Matilda, as well as for the younger Miss Melbourne; and they came in for their share of the prizes, of which Lady Torrendale was the distributor. Never, in Matilda's eyes, had she looked more interesting. During the period of the dancing, as well as that of the lottery which succeeded, she had seemed, for a moment, to have laid aside the fine lady, and to be entirely the mother, contemplating the pleasure and improvement of her child; and when she affectionately called the little Emily to her, and anxiously took precautions against her catching

cold, or over fatiguing herself, the amiable expression of countenance that lit up her faded features, restored to them some of those graces which they might have been supposed to possess in earlier times: these traits were few and transient; her ladyship soon resumed herself, and showed that she still was Lady Torrendale.

The handsomest prize in the collection, (consisting chiefly of fans, lockets, bracelets, smelling-bottles, necklaces, rings, toothpick-cases, and a variety of toys and trinkets, in ivory and sandal-wood) was a large broach, of a beautiful composition, set round with pearls of some value. Now this broach was intended as a *galanterie* to Miss Mountain; but by some mistake in the distribution of the prizes, it fell to Matilda's share. Lady Torrendale took an opportunity to inform Miss Mountain of its original destination, lamenting the awkward blunder by which it had been attached to the ticket held by "that chit, Miss Melbourne." She then sought out Matilda, and with one of those fascinating

smiles with which she usually prefaced any of her false confidences, she in a whisper declared she congratulated herself upon her lucky mistake; by which, she said; the ornament had fallen to one, whose person was so much better calculated to adorn it; and added, "if I must own my little malice, and I will, (for I value sincerity above all things,) I am glad you have mortified that ugly, stiff Mountain of pride; for her manners are growing insufferable, even to me." Matilda, who by this time had learnt how to appreciate her ladyship's "sincerity," made no reply to this compliment: the acquisition of a prize of any value, was a matter of great indifference to her; and it was not till long afterwards that she found the circumstance productive of consequences to her, which, from its apparent unimportance, she had not anticipated.

At supper, Arbella found ample occasion to renew the lamentations excited by the superior air of joy and contentment, that appeared in every face around, from

what she had observed at more brilliant entertainments. "How enviable," she cried, "the delight of those creatures! That little lord seems to have attained the *summum bonum* in the plate of trifle that is before him; and this little lady feels not a want or a wish, beyond those tempting raspberry drops; one young gentleman's whole soul is in his yellow shoes, and another young lady's whole heart in her green braces! How they eye each other! Toes turned in most pertinaciously, forming the model for Lady Spencer's correspondent designs of 'new shoes,' 'nice supper;' and that little fellow is happier than Fitzroy, after he had turned the heads of a whole ball-room; and little miss is happier than—heigho! There are no disputes where one shall sit—and who one shall talk to; and, when tired of eating, they have only to feast their eyes on temples and sugared ornaments, and be content!"

And now the more prudent part of the company made the signal for retiring, and

while each mother seemed anxiously engrossed in her darling charge, Matilda, who was truly one to Julia, was carefully securing her against any possible injury from the night air, of which the peculiar delicacy of her cousin's constitution made her more particularly apprehensive. Entirely engrossed by this object, and totally regardless of that admiration which Arbella was labouring so hard to obtain, she heeded not the enchanted gaze of Strathallan, when, hastily taking from her neck a light blue scarf, which she had worn the whole evening in consequence of her having a slight cold, she tied it round that of the little girl; discovering, for the first time that night, the ivory whiteness of her beautifully formed throat, which till then had been partially shaded. He admired the graceful turn of her form; far more the kind, the almost maternal expression that glowed in every mind-illumined feature; and only quitted his silent stand to follow her down stairs, and hand her to her chair.

In returning her fan, she perceived he had slipped a paper, with it, into her hand. It was not long before she examined its contents.

. . . . .

"Time presses.—I am beset with the "arguments of worldlings.—I can hardly "bear the sight of a father's increasing "anguish and anxiety; yet can I relieve "it at the expense of my feelings—my "principles—my life?

"My spirit shrinks from the idea of "owing a weight of obligation to one, "whom I cannot even repay by the pos- "session of my heart. That honour which "once urged me to be hers, now equally "whispers against our union. My hopes "were unclouded, my fortune flourishing, "when we were mutually promised to "each other; shall I now, with for- "tune impaired, and all the future shaded "with gloom and apprehension, ask her "to share it? Still I have enough left "for happiness and Matilda:—say but

"the word, and I am at your feet: but "beware how you drive me to despair;— "in one rash moment I may——

"Adieu, dearest! gentlest! I will not "re-read these distracted lines: trust me "they give the picture of a heart which, "though torn by varied sufferings, tor-"tured by anxiety, wrung by unde-"served reproach, will never cease to "throb in every bleeding vein for you. "Farewell, most lovely, most beloved of "women!

"Thine, (while he is his own,)

"STRATHALLAN."

. . . .

The despairing earnestness with which this proposal was urged, for a moment staggered the resolution of Matilda. She could think of nothing but her noble, her suffering lover. Her heart was wholly with *his*, that was offered, so generously, so unconditionally to her. His feelings were, in hers, as in a limpid stream reflected; and, like the image in a stream, in faithful, but somewhat fainter colours;

as suited best the, if possible, still greater purity and delicacy of her timid, retiring, fearful love. Yet, when she reconsidered his letter, she saw nothing but wretchedness inevitable, and too late repentance, as the consequence of her compliance. She perceived the necessity of keeping a strict watch over passions so much stronger than her own: too conscious that it required only to meet his eyes to render vain the conflict of months.

She now confined herself entirely within her narrow domestic circle, scarcely venturing abroad, and never where there was any chance of seeing him.

"You become quite a prisoner," said Clara: "you will lose your cheerfulness, "your health, almost your existence."

"Fear not for me," Matilda replied. "'Tis only thus I can ensure my freedom. I acknowledge no bonds but the disgraceful claims of passion,—I know no evil but weakness,—no enemy but the persevering love of Strathallan!"

CHAP. XIV.

Dear are those bonds my willing heart that bind,
Formed of three chords, in mystic union twined;
The first, by Beauty's rosy fingers wove,
The next by Pity, and the third by Love.

ROSCOE'S *Translation of Lorenzo de Medici.*

STRATHALLAN TO MATILDA.

"I MAKE you a prisoner. I shut you "out from society. The very air is grown "hateful to you, since it may be shared "with me.—It is enough:—I yield. "The morning has dawned upon the "third day passed at a distance from— "you. Days, welcomed by you as the "return of tranquillity and pleasure. By "me!—Oh! Matilda, you never knew "the pangs of absence:—suffice it, they "are past.

"But I am not forbidden to write. I "will make one more attempt. It is yet

"time. Could I see you, I am sure I "have arguments of force to move you; "but, repulsed by your family,—denied "your sight.——At your house I am re- "ceived by your mother with a look that "chills my hopes, or by that mournful "nun, in whose very aspect I, shuddering, "read a fearful omen of eternal separa- "tion.

"Dear, dear Matilda! in adversity how "doubly dear!—Yet why should I call "that adversity which brings me nearer "you? You say I have no right to urge "my plea:—yes, loveliest, I have a right, "a claim,—sorrow has made you mine; "and here I solemnly swear to renounce "all bonds, but those she has twined "around me.

"Vain arguments!—they will not "change the sternness of your immove- "able determination.—Yet still I write.— "I experience no cessation from tor- "ment, but in action. While I am thus "employed, I do not wholly yield to de- "spair.—Each plan attempted supposes

" possibility. When I recal the last de-
" lightful hours we passed together; when
" I behold your mild features beaming
" on others with interest or compassion,
" I cannot, no, I cannot believe that heart
" can be steeled against me alone. It is
" but too true; and my life, for this last
" year, has been a sweet, fallacious dream.
" Oh, had I died when report announced
" my death! Matilda would have mourned
" me, and pity would have wrung those
" tears that are denied to love. How fondly
" I believed them the sweet earnest of
" more precious tears! But no;—where
" most I seek affection, a malignant fate
" still delights to snatch from me the only
" boon I value, and I shall leave the world
" with the cruel thought, that by none
" have I been ever truly loved.

" It is midnight; but rest does not suit
" the fever—the madness of my mind.
" The hour shall be given to you,—to
" you, cruel girl; to make you, if possible,
" share the sufferings I endure, since bliss,
" with me, you will not share.

"You will call these the ravings of "passion.—You will smile, in the dignity "of superior firmness, at the frenzy that "dictates them.—You will despise their "writer,—and you are right—for I de- "spise myself.

"I am no boyish lover.—I was not used "to be the mere creature of passion—to "live upon a smile; there are moments, "in which my soul rises against its "self-imposed slavery; and do you not "fear that, in one of those moments, it "may for ever burst its chain?

"Matilda, it is in vain to deceive our- "selves.—We were intended for each "other. I have been thinking, but I can "find no obstacle, such as your cruel pru- "dence would suggest; no obstacle of "force sufficient to break those bonds, "which Heaven itself has formed; and "should you indeed succeed, would not "your heart at length confess a pang like "mine?—Am I deceived?—Let me atone "for my presumption at your feet. Recal "me to you,—recal me to myself."

It appeared that there the letter was meant to end; but a few more lines were added, in which the same request was still more passionately urged.

"I look every where, but in vain, to "seek myself.—In these fond transports "I know not Strathallan. Oh, Matilda, "this subjection is grievous, even though "endured for you.—My spirit spurns at "once, and loves its chain.

"Spurns did I say? forgive the uncon-"scious treason, and think it only a differ-"ent form of giving words to hopeless "love.—Yes, weep for me, and pray that "I may be restored to reason, virtue;—"armed with resolution to endure my "pitiless fate.—They say the prayers and "tears of angels are accepted.—Restrain "them yet;—I'll make one effort more: "one effort upon nature and compassion. "My father was not wont to scorn the "plaints of a kneeling son. I will tell "him the sacrifice he demands of me is "beyond my power, beyond my strength.

"I will tell him my whole existence hangs "upon my noble-minded, my obdurate "love; on her, to whose firmness alone, "he owes that I have not, in despite of his "ambitious views and wishes—Oh! when "his heart yields, as it surely will, and ad- "mits the claim of such distinguished vir- "tues; then, blest with a father's sanction, "I shall no longer fear a repulse.—I shall "no longer fear distracting doubts, and "suggested difficulties, even from Ma- "tilda."

With such letters, which he contrived, through Hanway, to convey to Matilda, Strathallan endeavoured to relieve the severity of his sufferings, when denied her sight; and, if possible, to work some change in her sentiments.—They wrung her heart; but could they alter her resolution?

CHAP. XV.

"True filial love, like the love of God, is accompanied with an awe and reverence, which, if its object will not remit or a little abate, they may live for ever in the same room, and be utter strangers to each other."

HERVEY.

Mrs. Melbourne was fully convinced of the truth of this observation; and from her daughter's earliest childhood had so blended, in her conduct towards her, the characters of parent and friend, that those delightful associations, too often irreconcileably divided, formed but one idea in Matilda's mind. In the retired life which choice and necessity conspired to make her lead, she felt the inestimable advantage of so amiable and enlightened a companion. There was no point in which Mrs. Melbourne differed from her sufficiently to disturb the intimate union and confidence that marked their little social

circle. Conformity of character is not absolutely necessary to friendship; though it is difficult for it to subsist under a perfect opposition of taste and sentiment: a degree of diversity only adds poignancy to its charms. In conversation Matilda had the most captivating flow of language, where any subject of feeling was discussed —most of the *éloquence du cœur*. Mrs. Melbourne had perhaps more liveliness of remark, and brilliancy of imagination. Among the arts, drawing was that in which Mrs. Melbourne most excelled. Miss Melbourne, though she understood, and had practiced it with success, still gave the preference to music. Yet in the most unguarded moment of conversation, of sportive contest, or unbounded confidence, the manner of Matilda never had, at any time, passed those limits of deference, which no freedom should ever tempt a child, when addressing a parent, to overstep. In her respectful familiarity there was no assumption of equality, nothing that could for a moment

appear, to the most superficial observer, to resemble the manner suited to a companion of her own age, welcome and becoming, when employed towards a friend; towards an Arbella.

That young lady found her aunt wholly averse to paying Mrs. Melbourne those civilities in town, which she had, with importunate servility, forced upon her in the country; and Mrs. Melbourne, who had held back very much from Mrs. Stockwell's acquaintance in her most prosperous days, was by no means sorry to escape her vulgar impertinence, when less agreeably, or, at least, less showily situated. Miss Ferrars was not, however, to be deterred, by that circumstance, from having her dear little dish of gossip with Matilda, as she styled it. Wishing to consult her upon the subject of Major O'Hara, she entered upon it at once, with "Do you know, my dear, the major talks of getting leave to join me in town, and I mean to write to him not

to think of it. Yet still to word it in such a manner—for he is not to be despised; he is gay, handsome, polite, *et pour la reste*——Why, Lord!" she continued, answering Matilda's eyes, "you would not have them all judges and philosophers."

"I said nothing!"

"No, but you *looked* something. I cannot bear those eyes of yours."

"I hope the gentlemen are not of your opinion," replied Miss Melbourne, attempting to catch the gaiety of her friend.

"No, you know they are not—you are safe enough there. I never saw so much art with so little ——: well, I'll not find fault with you, since you don't own to it, and, as the major says, *peccato celato*. You remember the rest. Apropos, do you know Major O'Hara has been in Italy? Can talk very well about the Pope, and the palaces at Rome, and the Florentine gallery, and the charms of a little Venetian Barcelone. It saves a

great deal of drawing upon one's own intellectual bank, which I am afraid would sometimes protest the bill."

"Still the major!" interrupted Matilda. "So Spencer, I see, is quite forgotten."

"Spencer!" repeated Arbella, starting as if thrilled by that name. "How could you, Matilda, bring me so suddenly to the most painful part of my story? when I, like a poor giddy insect, was fluttering and fluttering around it, treating of every thing distant from it, knowing it was necessary, yet fearing to approach. Spencer forgotten!" she continued, while the alteration in her voice and countenance announced the painful perturbation of her mind. "No, no; while one pulse that beats within this anxious frame vibrates to the voice of love or joy, thy name, dear Spencer, will never, never, be forgotten! Heigho, Matilda! there are moments, in which it is in vain to say, like La Volubile, in the Canzonet:

'Vo' star allegramente,
'Non vo' pensar a niente.'

The heart, the rebel heart, cries out, and will be heard. And then what a sudden pang, what agony, we sprightly ones for the moment endure. My only way is to run to my instrument, and rattle off a march, or a country dance, to drown its voice; or, if that won't do, rattle up my aunt, or my cousin Sam, or some wretch equally odious; or, if all is not sufficient, go and tease you, my sweet friend, who possess in your cheering conversation the only true specific against all such spasms. To-day Lady Torrendale shewed me a letter, in which Fitzroy, after a great deal of buzz, informs her of the progress he has made in the good graces of a northern heiress, whom he met accidentally at Grasmere, or Windermere, or some of those places; and he believes that he shall soon be united. Stay, no, I must give you the exact expression: surely the mother and son were formed from the self-same model.

That 'he believes he must soon take pity on Lady Margaret Maclean.' She did so laugh when she came to that expression, and exult in the address, and the airs of her darling Fitzroy. The wretch! after all he has said and sighed at Woodlands! but I had reason to expect it. Not a line, not a word ever came to confirm those protestations, from the time he left us to join his regiment. But I would have his Lady of the Lake, his high-born Margaretta, beware how she fancies she has secured that wandering heart. 'Tis but to alarm Spencer's jealousy, and he is here in an instant. Now O'Hara will exactly answer my purpose; for, imprimis, he is the fashion, which is all in all, according to my way of reasoning."

"In a lover? I don't admit your major."

"But you would, my dear, if you saw him. There is not a house in Buxton that could resist admitting him while he

stayed. He is the most beautiful, admirable—quite of that species."

"A beautiful—admirable—Indeed, Miss Ferrars?" exclaimed Sowerby, who had just that moment strolled into the room, with a book in his hand. "May I be favoured with a sight of it?"

"Oh, lud! sir," cried Arbella, forcing herself with the greatest difficulty to repress her laughter. "It—it is—not here."

"Can you oblige me then with a description of it? Is it larger than the ordinary size of that kind of Papilio?"

"Rather, sir," replied Arbella.

"Any variation as to colour?" continued Mr. Sowerby, gravely pulling out a pencil, and beginning to write.

"No, sir, not much. The usual scarlet and black, or some dark mixture, only its two superior wings are of a bright golden colour, and ——"

"My dear sir, we were not talking of butterflies; it is an officer she means," in-

terrupted Matilda, who did not choose the grave pursuits of her friend should expose him to the childish ridicule of Arbella.

A significant "pugh!" from Sowerby evinced the contempt he felt upon this discovery.

"Pugh!" repeated Arbella, most highly offended, "you shall unsay that 'pugh!' again, Mr. Philosopher. I'll teach you to treat young ladies so, who do you the honour of making a rational reply to your tiresome observations." Then approaching the window, where he still stood, affecting to be more intently engaged than ever upon his book, "May I be permitted, sir?" she said aloud, as she archly peeped over his shoulder. "What have we got here? Philosophical Transactions! I wonder, Mr. Sowerby, you can waste your time on such reading."

"Why, young lady, do you not think it at least a harmless way of passing time?"

"Harmless enough; but it is so stupid!"

Sowerby stared, and for some moments could not recover from his astonishment, at the unparalleled liberty thus taken with the dignity of his silent studies; a liberty, that, in the course of their long and intimate acquaintance, his gentle Matilda had never once ventured upon. This was exactly what Arbella wanted.

"You are no doubt a good judge, young lady, of the object of those pursuits you take upon you to deride."

"Something of a judge, I flatter myself, sir. I have attended the lectures of a few professors; have gone through a course of chemistry; and since my acquaintance with Miss Melbourne, have endeavoured to avail myself of her uncommon acquirements, to ——"

"Really!" exclaimed Sowerby, and condescended to enter into conversation with the fair intruder, and to examine a little into her pretensions to such univer-

sal acquirement. Arbella had some knowledge, and still more knack. What she had learnt, she could bring out immediately, and display to the greatest possible advantage; and if ever she found herself at a loss, she displayed such good humour and candour in the acknowledgment of her deficiency, that it amply compensated for the want of greater depth of information. Even the severe Mr. Sowerby could not bring himself to bear hard upon errors, which were acknowledged with a laugh, betraying two rows of teeth, like pearls for evenness and lustre, and a blush, which brought the pure blood in transparent brilliancy to animate the clear brown of her ever varying complexion. "You will be surprised to find me so learned;" she continued, turning gaily to Matilda, after he had left the room. "I, who before the high-priest of Apollo, Alcæus, had vowed fidelity to the cerulean symbol of Belles Lettres, and a thousand times forsworn the dirty nymphs of the mines and cru-

cible. Well, postpone your curiosity, for I want now to talk about Sir Harold. Did you ever hear any reason assumed for his giving up his superb family residence, and pitching his tent at the Rocks?"

"Never!"

"And can't you guess it?"

"No!"

"Oh, then I cannot venture to tell you. Indeed, I don't know it myself; and it would not be right to say it. What? have you no curiosity? won't you ask? Sir Harold gets his wines from Italy, his servants from France; what if a little Neapolitan nun, or Milanese signora, had accompanied his rapid flight back to England, and declared the wilderness, and the gold fish-pond, and the camera obscura at the Rocks, the prettiest, 'tastiest' things she had ever seen since she left her dear native home; and that she would not, no, she could not, leave them to return to that gloomy old mansion, among the ghosts and the goblins, and the owls and the ivy! Or perhaps

some little sylph speaks peace to his wounded spirit from the groves. Some fairy strews good luck on every sacred room, or in short ——"

"Arbella, that is not a subject to jest upon," said Matilda gravely. "Sir Harold is my relation, and as such I must be interested in what concerns him. He is Julia's brother, and I must wish him, for her sake, a man of honour and principle. If you have any thing seriously against him, say it; if not, do not, by ambiguous hints, trifle with a calamity that ——"

"Nothing, nothing, but guess-work, my dear, I assure you. Sir Harold may be the very mirror of knighthood, and flower of chivalry, for any thing that I know to the contrary. Lord how she colours! I did not think it could interest you so much. To call a new cause, you see Lord Torrendale is proceeding in all his grand nuptial preparations, very much to his own satisfaction, and soon I believe somebody may sing '*Più non ho la dolce speranza.*' Heavens! what have I done?"

she continued, observing the emotion her friend in vain endeavoured to conceal. "Now I take all the powers above to witness, I meant Miss Langrish, when I rattled off that remark. One may talk of Miss Langrish, may not one? As for another dear little friend of mine, my *real* opinion is, that she has nothing to fear. The exalted Sophia must love her Strathallan; it is impossible but she must, with all her greatness and her coldness too. But I am positive—stay—I won't be positive of any thing. Yet surely, if those 'Eyes, like break of day;' those 'Lights that do mislead the morn,' do not mislead me too, which would be a much worse thing, they tell me the bird will yet burst through his confinement. They tell me Strathallan will never consent to unite himself for money to that *mountain* of pride and paint. Excuse me, but I am positive she enamels; ay faith, and puts on a vast deal too." Arbella noticed the expression of surprise and dislike, that Matilda could no longer restrain, at lan-

guage so new and unbecoming, and which she had heard often repeated during the latter part of their conversation. "Now," continued Miss Ferrars, enjoying her friend's astonishment, "she thinks me quite rusticated with my aunt, because I use a few expletives, to embroider and set off my meaning; but 'tis quite the reverse: they are fresh from the mint. Lady Dareall and Lady Barbara Montravers have made them quite the rage, and they have become the most fashionable women in the world by it."

"Do you not rather think such language is become fashionable *because* Lady Dareall uses it, than that Lady Dareall has become fashionable by the use of such language; and had not we better, my Arbella, who are not at the topmost round of fashion's ladder, content ourselves with imitating some of the many graceful and improving models the great world affords, than risk exposing ourselves to its censure, by following any one solitary example into dangerous eccentricity, with-

out possessing rank or consequence to excuse it, or make it admired?"

"Hum! there may be something in what you say: for certainly those women are of the very first dash. Now whereabouts was I when you interrupted me? O, I was saying that Strathallan ——"

"Dear Arbella!"

"Well, I will not name Strathallan, if the sound is disagreeable to you. What shall I call him, charmer, charmer, charmer? We will give him the name of *le Desiré*, *le Bien-aimé*, or whatever other *nom de guerre*, or rather love-name, you like best. By the by," continued the volatile Arbella, overlooking, in the new train of ideas her fancy had raised, the subject which but a moment before had employed her thoughts: "Do you not think that word *Bien-aimé* has a charm in the French language, which we would vainly endeavour to transfer into our own? In Claire d'Albe for instance, (but you would never read Claire d'Albe for me, you obstinate gipsy) it has a tender-

ness—an expression; and in that other novel, (by the same writer) which I call Love in the Deserts, for I always forget the name; when the dear charming three-tailed Bashaw, that Malek Adhel, says to your name-sake, '*Que crains tu, ma bien-aimée?*' Oh Lord! I am sure I should have feared nothing with such a defender. Now how would you render the expression *Bien-aimée?* The literal translation is horrid. *Well-beloved!* you might as well at once say, right trusty, and well-beloved."

"It does not convey that idea to me," said Matilda, smiling. "I have friends well-beloved, yet whom I would by no means trust." In uttering this sentiment Matilda was far from meaning to insinuate any idea to the disadvantage of Arbella; though to some it might appear that, while at the same time encouraging Captain Fitzroy and Major O'Hara, she wished also to have the grave philosopher in her train. But Matilda knew her friend's principle, on those occasions. To

please was her whole design. "You can never have too many *prôneurs*," was her maxim. "Those who may not please, at least can praise. In this bad world success is merit. A circle of beaux is the true cestus of beauty, and attracts additional admirers to the fair one, who, if observed to be neglected by some, might be pronounced unworthy of the attention of any. The fruit that's most picked by the birds, is always observed to be the best," says the dear countess. And with these laudable maxims, Arbella applied herself, and with success, during the frequent visits she paid her friend, to gain the "good word" of Mr. Sowerby.

CHAP. XVI.

"Who aims at every science, soon will find,
The field how vast—how limited the mind!"

MISS MORE. *Search after Happiness.*

LADY Torrendale had not forgotten her good custom, taken up at Woodlands, of sending Miss Melbourne notes, in what she called the language of "the dear region." When these contained any thing that could amuse the social circle, they were read aloud; but sometimes the "gipsy jargon" was so unintelligible, as to be evidently intended for Miss Melbourne's eye alone. One evening when the usual party, consisting of Sowerby, his sister, Mrs. Melbourne, and Matilda, were assembled, one of these rose-coloured billets arrived; and, being delivered to Mr.

Sowerby by mistake, for one he had that day expected, was read by him, with good emphasis, for the benefit of the company. It was without a signature, and the following is a literal transcript of the contents:

"My dear soul,

"We are all at sea without the admiral; are there no hopes of *Vice* or *Rear?* Above all things the Orange flag is to be preferred; but perhaps you would less scruple about the Mitre?"

Sowerby had the greatest confidence in the discretion of Matilda; but there was something in the allusions contained in this ambiguous billet, that staggered and confused all his ideas. He was aware Miss Melbourne might have met at Lady Torrendale's many acquaintance, of whom he knew nothing. But if she confided plans to a stranger, from which he was excluded; if he was to lose the character of her friend and guide, life no longer

presented to him any thing pleasing or desirable. These thoughts, as they rapidly crossed his mind, betrayed themselves partly in his countenance. Miss Melbourne observed them, and the innocent and spontaneous burst of laughter, in which she so seldom indulged, instantly restored his good humour, and dispelled his fears. "May I be entrusted then with the key to this wonderful and astonishing billet?" he asked with a smile.

"My dear sir, the key is, that Lady Torrendale is making a little museum."

"A museum!" Sowerby repeated, with the air of a person who had at once discovered the clue to some intricate mystery; and then, knitting his brow, with an air that convinced Matilda it was in vain to urge the request that trembled on her lips, he instantly turned the conversation.

It will be necessary, in order to explain thisscene, to refer to the occurrences of the preceding week. Matilda had forgotten to remind Arbella of her promise, to in-

form her how it happened she had made such a wonderful progress in the sciences; when a card of invitation to a conversazione upon a new plan, at Lady Torrendale's, at once solved the difficulty. This ticket, which was of white and gold, adorned with groups of plants, shells, and foliage, on its embossed border, and farther decorated by a pleasing design, representing "amusement lighting her torch at the lamp of science," unveiled to Matilda the nature of her ladyship's present pursuits; and she was not slow in, herself, unfolding them more fully to her young friend. "At length I have hit upon something, that I think will please you," she said. "I used to talk of renewing the literary conversaziones in London; but I find we were all wrong there. Scientific assemblies, to hear some clever man talk, are all the rage; and I don't see why I should not avail myself of the great advantage I had in Derbyshire, of an introduction to a family so much better versed in those matters, than any of our

fashionable dillettanti can pretend to be. You will be the chief ornament of these conversaziones, which must be quite to your taste; and you can put me right whenever ——"

"Excuse me, dear madam: the state of my mother's spirits at present prevents her from mixing in society; and I make it a rule never to leave her."

More disappointed than the occasion seemed to require, her ladyship renewed her entreaties, and made use of every form of persuasion to gain her point; but Matilda, sometimes referring to her necessary attention to her mother, sometimes to the care that Julia required, continued resolutely to refuse going to Lady Torrendale's, or rather to the house which Strathallan inhabited; till the countess wearied out, exclaimed, "What then am I to do? I must have these people, as I have asked them; and I hope you will give me a little assistance, though you won't be of the party. We are to begin with conchology; and that will bring my

collection into play. Now it is far from being complete, and I was quite vexed with Lady Valeria Volute, to whom I shewed it the other day, and who, the whole time, kept looking up and down, and enquiring for every thing she did *not* see, instead of admiring what she *did*. "Have not you got a watering-pot? I don't see any admirals, nor any nautili. You could surely procure some admirals, Grand, Vice, or Rear. Dear Lady Torrendale, you have been shamefully taken in; you have hardly got any thing but what a conchologist would throw aside, as only fit to make flowers, and adorn grottos in ladies shell-work!" Now I should like to shew her it is not so; yet I do not wish to go to any enormous expense neither. They say a single Admiral (the Orange Flag, I believe,) was sold abroad for a million of florins."

"A hundred, dear Lady Torrendale."

"Well a hundred, or whatever it was; any coin could I think be a great deal better employed, particularly when one

can borrow of one's friends, who know better how to choose those things. So you know you will ask Mr. Sowerby."

"Ask him what, madam?"

"Did not I explain myself sufficiently?" returned Lady Torrendale, a little vexed by the slowness of her young friend: then altering the mode of attack, "I am to have a very clever man," she said, "on Thursday, and there's to be Lady Valeria Volute, and Lady Virginia Nightingale, and this Mr. Professor Von Krustakoat, from Sweden, will give us a dissertation upon non-descript shells; and we are to have a little mineralogy, and a little chemistry; and now if I could show Mr. Professor Von Krustakoat a specimen of the buccinum, the beautiful non-descript from New South Wales, it would greatly assist his eloquence, and make him think my collection superior even to Lady Valeria's. Now tax your memory, my sweet Matilda; do you know of any one who has such a shell?"

"Really I do not; perhaps Sir J——

B——, or perhaps your ladyship will find it at the British Museum, or —"

"Perhaps, you are a dear charming little simpleton. It is Mr. Sowerby has the buccinum in his possession; the scarlet buccinum, the most beautiful of all; and he must lend it me for one night, for my scientific supper."

"Excuse me, dear Lady Torrendale," interrupted Matilda, with a look of alarm. "I dare not ask him such a thing; indeed I dare not. You know not the value he sets upon his collections."

"Indeed I do, and I set a great value on them too, and that's the reason he must lend me some of them. The buccinum, and the mitre, and several different sorts of admirals," continued her ladyship, enumerating what she wanted with the most provoking obstinacy, and as if she had not heard Matilda's objection. "Why, Lord," she pursued, "you do not think I want to embezzle them? You know I think a piece of china much prettier, and after the evening was over would not

care if all the shells that ever existed were sunk in the sea, from whence they came; only when I exhibit my cabinet of natural curiosities, let me but appear to possess them, and ——"

Matilda smiled at the mingled inanity and love of vain display which this confession exhibited; so completely illustrating in another point of view her mother's observation, that Lady Torrendale was *all outside*; but she knew too well Mr. Sowerby's peculiar aversion to all such applications, to undertake a commission in which failure seemed inevitable.

"Well," resumed her ladyship abruptly, "I really did think, Matilda, you would have been a little more obliging. I give up the buccinum, but the other shells I positively must have, or I put off the party. To have them all coming down upon me, and find me so utterly unprovided; and after boasting so much too! Lady Valeria Volute, Lady Virginia, and Lady Chrysanthia Nightingale, Sir Haarlem Von Huyser, Sir Jacob

Thornback, Mr. Petal, Mr. Cruciform, and Mr. Professor Von Krustakoat!" But perceiving this enumeration did not affect her auditor so much as herself, she added, "If you will not be persuaded, we will think no more of it; but there is one little favour, which depends entirely on yourself, and which I trust you wont deny me; it is to let me have some of these specimens of Indian grasses, that your ——, that you promised me once in the country."

"With pleasure, dear Lady Torrendale," said Matilda, delighted she had it at last in her power to oblige her noble friend. "The jatamansi I think you mean."

"I believe I do. I don't know what I mean; you have put all my ideas into confusion. All I was thinking was, that as we may have a little botany in the course of the evening, it might be an opportunity to shew one's knowledge."

"Certainly, madam; and you will remember," continued Matilda, gently

prompting her, "that it is supposed to be the same with the Indian nard. Indeed, with the name of nard, spike-nard, and other Eastern perfumes," (she continued smiling) "we are pretty well familiarised in a book we often read."

"A book we often read?" exclaimed her ladyship, eagerly. "What upon earth can that be—one of Alcæus's?"

"No; an Oriental work."

"An Oriental work! It must then be the Arabian Nights.—No?—Nor the Persian Tales!"

Matilda blushed; and after the countess had run herself almost out of breath, half through the "Cabinet des Fées," could not bring her herself to name what the book was, to which she had alluded. "Well, now I am ready to take my departure," said her lively ladyship. "I am only waiting for the Buccinum, the Mitre, and the Volutes." This sudden attack proving as unsuccessful as the preceding ones, Lady Torrendale found herself obliged reluctantly to give up, with a secret

acknowledgment, that the quiet directness and steadiness of her young friend, was a match for all the starts and windings of her little policy. She, however, could not be led so easily to renounce her other object, which was to draw Matilda to her house; and, in pursuance of this design, continued to practise various manœuvres, many of which were as curious as the one above related. On that occasion, as in every drama where she bore a part, her ladyship, it may be observed, contrived to have an underplot (involving some petty and ridiculous interest) going on at the same time; for she really intended the scientific display, she had mentioned with such complacency to Matilda; and the note Sowerby had read, was the result of a despairing effort to obtain, from the good-nature of her young friend, the articles she so much desired.

From her varied persecutions Miss Melbourne at length was freed, by the departure of the countess.

Lord Torrendale, though he could not

be induced by any arguments to change his determination with regard to Strathallan, suffered so much from the sight of the misery he caused, and the daily increasing domestic dissensions which divided his family, that it brought on a severe attack of a bilious complaint, to which he was often subject, and he was advised by his physicians to try the Tunbridge waters for relief. His lady declared she would accompany him, at least for a week or two, and announced her intention in a take-leave visit to Mrs. Melbourne, in which she did not fail to assume some credit to herself for leaving London, though for ever so short a time, at the height of its gaieties.

"To be sure," she said, "I shall disappoint Lady Heathcote, and Lady Lyndhurst, and Lady Kilcare, and Mrs. Murray, and Lady Jane Murray, and Mrs. Howard; and there's Miss Mountain's grand masquerade, and poor little Miss De Courcy, that I promised to take out whenever her dear literary mother was in

the vapours or had the *blue* devils. I have engagements, three for every evening, but my duties must be preferred to them all. Sad restraints, Matilda, but unavoidable to persons of *our* way of thinking. His friend Villiers has made every thing agreeable to Torrendale, by lending him his house; yet still, as he is not well, I do not like to let him go among strangers by himself, quite at first—he might miss my attentions; and, besides," she added in a whisper, "to tell you the truth, I mean by this *short excrescence*, as poor Mrs. Stockwell would call it, to *cut* the scientific assemblies. You know I planned them partly for you, but as you were so disagreeable," (how her ladyship had contrived to travel from Tunbridge to her 'disagreeableness,' Matilda could not guess—but so it was,) "as you were so disagreeable, they have few attractions for me. The evening passed off very heavy. None of my friends made any figure. Little Sappho, whom I had desired to be remarkably brilliant, was quite the reverse.

I mistook her, I find; I thought she was a—somehow you know—a genius; but at the end of Mr. Professor Von Krustakoat's discourse upon conchs, she had absolutely nothing to say; and Mr. Cruciform assured me she did not know the difference between Anthoxanthum odoratum, and Trifolium Macrorrhizum.—Arbella yawned,—Strathallen was distracted; but that is only *comme a l'ordinaire;* and Lord Torrendale was, if possible, more oppressive than usual. Well, you know this cannot go on: so having given out I should have two of these scientific parties a week, I am not sorry, by going for a little time into the country, to make the whole plan be forgotten; and may be, by the time I return, something quite new will be the fashion. And now I am come to the grand favour for which, to let you into a secret, I have paid this visit: it is to request you will take charge of my little wild girl for the week or ten days that I shall be out of town. I do not want to take her down to Tunbridge with me for

so very short a time, because children are very troublesome, and I have nobody to stay with her, as I have been just obliged to dismiss Miss Langrish, for a thousand reasons that I shall tell you another time. My friends have been tearing her from one another, but I have given the preference to Mrs. Melbourne over them all, as you two are the only persons in the world I would entrust with such a precious charge."

Though this was said in her ladyship's most obliging manner, and with a look which seemed to expect an answering acknowledgment, Mrs. and Miss Melbourne were too well aware of the predominence of self in her disposition to doubt that she studied any thing in this arrangement but her own convenience. Yet, though by no means elated, as she supposed they would be by the compliment, they made not the slightest objection to the proposal. Mrs. Melbourne's maternal good nature easily led her to enter into the anxiety of the countess; and Matilda, who saw herself

an object of dislike to one part of the family, and treated with capricious favour by the other, was eager, by any service in her power, to pay off the debt of gratitude, any former acts of kindness and attention might claim;

"For to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind."

The marked coldness of Lord Torrendale's manner to her at the children's ball, and on every occasion in which she had accidentally met him, hurt her as equally unkind and undeserved. In the midst of many subjects of painful reflection, the arrival of a letter from the Rocks gave rather an agreeable turn to the course of her feelings. The unabated affection and gratitude it expressed, convinced Matilda, notwithstanding Arbella's random assertions, that the soul which dictated those effusions could not be the abode of duplicity or guilt.

"Flattering expressions!" exclaimed Mrs. Melbourne; "but what do they avail,

when one unhappy circumstance forces us to view that alliance with horror which might otherwise have gratified a mother's most sanguine wishes? Birth, character, ages suitable; for the seven or eight years between you and Sir Harold make only an advantageous difference. How little do we know what is best for us! Married in the same year, how often did I envy the bride of Sir Reginald Melbourne the possession of a promising boy, while you were not accorded to my prayers till after long, long years of expectation!"

"Little indeed!" sighed Matilda, as she stood with her eyes rivetted to the letter, in fixed and despairing attention; for the concluding paragraph, at which she had arrived, damped all the satisfaction the previous part had given her.

"I sought, in London, your noble Strathallan; but he for ever eluded my search: or, if we met, your love, like a protecting shield, defended his bosom from the vengeance I prepared. But he yet may mourn the charming hours he owes you! Oh,

shades of Woodlands! shades where I have learned that, which, if I valued peace, I had better have never known: not even in your retreats will I give the purposed blow—his hour approaches—I wait him at the Rocks!"

END OF VOL. II.



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